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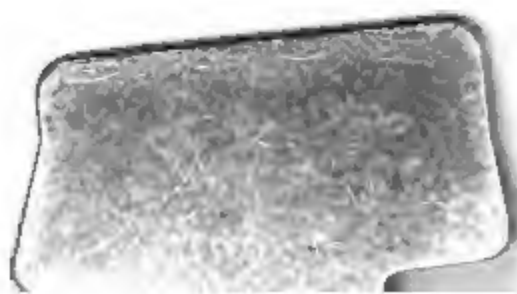
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S. NATURAL LIFE



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HIS NATURAL LIFE.

BY
MARCUS CLARKE,

AUTHOR OF
"OLD TALES OF A YOUNG COUNTRY," "HOLIDAY PEAK," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.



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HIS NATURAL LIFE.

BOOK III.—CONTINUED.

CHAPTER XXII.

GATHERING IN THE THREADS.

MAURICE found his favourable expectations of Sydney fully realized. His notable escape from death at Macquarie Harbour, his alliance with the daughter of so respected a colonist as Major Vickers, and his reputation as a convict disciplinarian, rendered him a man of note. He received a vacant magistracy, and became even more noted for hardness of heart and artfulness of prison knowledge than before. The convict population spoke of him as "that —— Frere," and registered vows of

vengeance against him, which he laughed—in his bluffness—to scorn.

One anecdote concerning the method by which he shepherded his flock will suffice to show his character and his value. It was his custom to visit the prison-yard at Hyde Park Barracks twice a week. Visitors to convicts were, of course, armed, and the two pistol-butts that peeped from Frere's waistcoat attracted many a longing eye. How easy would it be for some fellow to pluck one forth and shatter the smiling, hateful face of the noted disciplinarian ! Frere, however, brave to rashness, never would bestow his weapons more safely, but lounged through the yards with his hands in the pockets of his shooting-coat, and the deadly butts ready to the hand of any one bold enough to take them.

One day a man named Kavanagh, a captured absconder, who had openly sworn in the dock the death of the magistrate, walked quickly up to him as he was passing through the yard, and snatched a pistol from his belt. The yard caught its breath, and the attendant warder, hearing the click of the lock, instinctively turned his head away, so that he might not be blinded by the flash. But

Kavanagh did not fire. At the instant when his hand was on the pistol, he looked up and met the magnetic glance of Frere's imperious eyes. An effort, and the spell would have been broken. A twitch of the finger, and his enemy would have fallen dead. There was an instant when that twitch of the finger could have been given, but Kavanagh let that instant pass. The dauntless eye fascinated him. He played with the pistol nervously, while all remained stupefied. Frere stood, without withdrawing his hands from the pockets into which they were plunged.

"That's a fine pistol, Jack," he said at last.

Kavanagh, down whose white face the sweat was pouring, burst into a hideous laugh of relieved terror, and thrust the weapon, cocked as it was, back again into the magistrate's belt.

Frere slowly drew one hand from his pocket, took the cocked pistol and levelled it at his recent assailant. "That's the best chance *you'll* ever get, Jack," said he.

Kavanagh fell on his knees. "For God's sake, Captain Frere!"

Frere looked down upon the trembling wretch, and then uncocked the pistol, with a

laugh of ferocious contempt. "Get up, you dog," he said. "It takes a better man than you to best me. Bring him up in the morning, Hawkins, and we'll give him five-and-twenty."

As he went out—so great is the admiration for Power—the poor devils in the yard cheered him.

One of the first things that this useful officer did upon his arrival in Sydney was to inquire for Sarah Purfoy. To his astonishment, he discovered that she was the proprietor of large export warehouses in Pitt-street, owned a neat cottage on one of the points of land which jutted into the bay, and was reputed to possess a banking account of no inconsiderable magnitude. He in vain applied his brains to solve this mystery. His cast-off mistress had not been rich when she left Van Diemen's Land—at least, so she had assured him, and appearances bore out her assurance. How had she accumulated this sudden wealth? Above all, why had she thus invested it? He made inquiries at the banks, but was snubbed for his pains. Sydney banks in those days did some queer business.

"Mrs. Purfoy had come to them fully accredited," said the manager, with a smile.

"But where did she get the money?" asked the magistrate. "I am suspicious of these sudden fortunes. The woman was a notorious character in Hobart Town, and when she left hadn't a penny."

"My dear Captain Frere," said the acute banker—his father had been one of the builders of the 'Rum Hospital'—"it is not the custom of our bank to make inquiries into the previous history of its customers. The bills were good, you may depend, or we should not have honoured them. Good morning!"

"The bills!" Frere saw but one explanation. Sarah had received the proceeds of some of Rex's rogueries. Rex's letter to his father, and the mention of the sum of money "in the old house in Blue Anchor Yard," flashed across his memory. Perhaps Sarah had got the money from the receiver and appropriated it. But why invest it in an oil and tallow warehouse? He had always been suspicious of the woman, because he had never understood her, and his suspicions redoubled. Convinced that there was some plot hatching, he determined to use all the advantages that his position gave him

to discover the secret and bring it to light. The name of the man to whom Rex's letter had been addressed was "Blick." He would find out if any of the convicts under his care had heard of Blick. Prosecuting his inquiries in the proper direction, he soon obtained a reply. Blick was a London receiver of stolen goods, known to at least a dozen of the black sheep of the Sydney fold. He was reputed to be enormously wealthy, had often been tried, but never convicted. Frere was thus not much nearer enlightenment than before, and an incident occurred a few months afterwards which increased his bewilderment. He had not been long established in his magistracy, when Blunt came to claim payment for the voyage of Sarah Purfoy. "There's that schooner going begging, one may say, sir," said Blunt, when the office door was shut.

"What schooner?"

"The *Franklin*."

Now the *Franklin* was a vessel of three hundred and twenty tons, which plied between Norfolk and Sydney, as the *Osprey* had plied in the old days between Macquarie Harbour and Hobart Town. "I am afraid that is rather stiff, Blunt," said Frere. "That's one

of the best billets going, you know. I doubt if I have enough interest to get it for you. Besides," he added, eyeing the sailor critically, "you are getting oldish for that sort of thing, ain't you?"

Phineas Blunt stretched his arms wide, and opened his mouth, full of sound white teeth. "I am good for twenty years more yet, sir," he said. "My father was trading to the Indies at seventy-five years of age. *I'm* hearty enough, thank God; for, barring a drop of rum now and then, I've no vices to speak of. However, I ain't in a hurry, Captain, for a month or so; only I thought I'd jog your memory a bit, d'ye see."

"Oh, you're not in a hurry; where are you going then?"

"Well," said Blunt, shifting on his seat, uneasy under Frere's convict disciplined eye, "I've got a job on hand."

"Glad of it, I'm sure. What sort of a job?"

"A job of whaling," said Blunt, more uneasy than before.

"Oh, that's it, is it. Your old line of business. And who employs you now?" There was no suspicion in the tone, and had Blunt chosen to evade the question, he might have done so without difficulty, but he replied as

one who had anticipated such questioning, and had been advised how to answer it.

“Mrs. Purfoy.”

“What!” cried Frere, scarcely able to believe his ears.

“She’s got a couple of ships now, Captain, and she made me skipper of one of ’em. We look for beshdellamare,* and take a turn at harpooning sometimes.”

Frere stared at Blunt, who stared at the window. There was—so the instinct of the magistrate told him—some strange project afoot. Yet that common sense which so often misleads us, urged that it was quite natural Sarah should employ whaling vessels to increase her trade. Granted that there was nothing wrong about her obtaining the business, there was nothing strange about her owning a couple of whaling vessels. There were people in Sydney, of no better origin, who owned half-a-dozen. “Oh,” said he. “And when do you start?”

“I’m expecting to get the word every day,” returned Blunt, apparently relieved, “and I thought I’d just come and see you first, in *case* of anything falling in.” Frere played with a penknife on the table in silence for a

* Bêche-de-la-mer.

while, allowing it to fall through his fingers with a series of sharp clicks, and then he said, "Where does she get the money from?"

"Blest if I know!" said Blunt, in unaffected simplicity. "That's beyond me. She says she saved it. But that's all my eye, you know."

"*You* don't know anything about it, then," cried Frere, suddenly fierce.

"No, not I."

"Because, if there's any game on, she'd better take care," he cried, relapsing, in his excitement, into the convict vernacular. "She knows me. Tell her that I've got my eyes on her. Let her remember her bargain. If she runs any rigs on me, let her take care." In his suspicious wrath he so savagely and unwarily struck downwards with the open pen-knife that it shut upon his fingers, and cut him to the bone.

"I'll tell her," said Blunt, wiping his brow. "I'm sure she wouldn't go to sell you. But I'll look in when I come back, sir." When he got outside he drew a long breath. "By the Lord Harry, but it's a ticklish game to play," he said to himself, with a lively recollection of the dreaded Frere's vehemence; "and there's only one woman in the world I'd be fool enough to play it for."

Maurice Frere, oppressed with suspicions, ordered his horse that afternoon, and rode down to see the cottage which the owner of "Purfoy Stores" had purchased. He found it a low white building, situated four miles from the city, at the extreme end of a tongue of land which ran into the deep waters of the harbour. A garden, carefully cultivated, stood between the roadway and the house, and in this garden he saw a man digging.

"Does Mrs. Purfoy live here?" he asked, pushing open one of the iron gates.

The man replied in the affirmative, staring at the visitor with some suspicion.

"Is she at home?"

"No."

"You are sure."

"If you don't believe me, ask at the house," was the reply, given in the uncourteous tone of a free man.

Frere pushed his horse through the gate, and walked up the broad and well-kept carriage drive. A man-servant in livery, answering his ring, told him that Mrs. Purfoy had gone to town, and then shut the door in his face. Frere, more astonished than ever at these outward and visible signs of independence, paused indignant, feeling half

inclined to enter despite opposition. As he looked through the break of the trees, he saw the masts of a brig lying at anchor off the extremity of the point on which the house was built, and understood that the cottage commanded communication by water as well as by land. Could there be a special motive in choosing such a situation, or was it mere chance? He was uneasy, but strove to dismiss his alarm.

Sarah had kept faith with him so far. She had entered upon a new and more reputable life, and why should he seek to imagine evil where perhaps no evil was. Blunt was evidently honest. Women like Sarah Purfoy often emerged into a condition of comparative riches and apparent domestic virtue. It was likely that, after all, some wealthy merchant was the real owner of house and garden, pleasure yacht, and tallow warehouse, and that he had no cause for fear.

The experienced convict disciplinarian did not rate the ability of John Rex high enough.

From the instant the convict had heard his sentence of life banishment, he had determined upon escaping, and had brought all the powers of his acute and unscrupulous

intellect to the consideration of the best method of achieving his purpose. His first care was to procure money. This he thought to do by writing to Blick, but when informed by Meekin of the fate of his letter, he adopted the—to him—less pleasant alternative of procuring it through Sarah Purfoy.

It was peculiar to the man's hard and ungrateful nature that, despite the attachment of the woman who had followed him to his place of durance, and had made it the object of her life to set him free, he had cherished for her no affection. It was her beauty that attracted him, when, as Mr. Lionel Crofton, he swaggered in the night-society of London. Her talents and her devotion were secondary considerations—useful to him as attributes of a creature he owned, but not to be thought of when his fancy wearied of its choice. During the twelve years which had passed since his rashness had delivered him into the hands of the law at the house of Green, the coiner, he had been oppressed with no regrets for her fate. He had, indeed, seen and suffered so much, that the old life had been put away from him. When, on his return, he heard that Sarah Purfoy was still in Hobart Town, he was glad, for he knew that he had an ally

who would do her utmost to help him—she had shown that on board the *Malabar*. But he was also sorry, for he remembered that the price she would demand for her services was his affection, and that had cooled long ago. However, he would make use of her. There might be a way to discard her if she proved troublesome.

His pretended piety had accomplished the end he had assumed it for. Despite Frere's exposure of his cryptograph, he had won the confidence of Meekin; and into that worthy creature's ear he poured a strange and sad history. He was the son, he said, of a clergyman of the Church of England, whose real name, such was his reverence for the cloth, should never pass his lips. He was transported for a forgery which he did not commit. Sarah Purfoy was his wife—his erring, lost, and yet loved wife. She, an innocent and trusting girl, had determined—strong in the remembrance of that promise she had made at the altar—to follow her husband to his place of doom, and had hired herself as lady's-maid to Mrs. Vickers. Alas! fever prostrated that husband on a bed of sickness, and Maurice Frere, the profligate and the villain, had taken advantage of the wife's unprotected

state to ruin her! Rex darkly hinted how the seducer made his power over the sick and helpless husband a weapon against the virtue of the wife; and so terrified poor Meekin, that, had it not "happened so long ago," he would have thought it necessary to look with some disfavour upon the boisterous son-in-law of Major Vickers.

"I bear him no ill-will, sir," said Rex. "I did at first. There was a time when I could have killed him, but when I had him in my power, I—as you know—forbore to strike. No, sir, I could not commit murder!"

"Very proper," says Meekin, "very proper indeed."

"God will punish him in His own way, and His own time," continued Rex. "My great sorrow is for the poor woman. She is in Sydney, I have heard, living respectably, sir; and my heart bleeds for her." Here Rex heaved a sigh that would have made his fortune on the boards.

"My poor fellow," said Meekin. "Do you know where she is?"

"I do, sir."

"You might write to her."

John Rex appeared to hesitate, to struggle with himself, and finally to take a deep resolve. "No, Mr. Meekin, I will not write."

.

“ Why not ?”

“ You know the orders, sir—the Commandant *reads* all the letters sent. Could I write to my poor Sarah what other eyes were to read ?” and he watched the parson slyly.

“ N—no, you could not,” said Meekin, at last.

“ It is true, sir,” said Rex, letting his head sink on his breast.

The next day, Meekin, blushing with the consciousness that what he was about to do was wrong, said to his penitent, “ If you will promise to write nothing that the Commandant *might* not see, Rex, *I* will send your letter to your wife.”

“ Heaven bless you, sir,” said Rex, and took two days to compose an epistle which should tell Sarah Purfoy how to act. The letter was a model of composition in one way. It stated everything clearly and succinctly. Not a detail that could assist was omitted—not a line that could embarrass was suffered to remain. John Rex’s scheme of six months’ deliberation was set down in the clearest possible manner. He brought his letter unsealed to Meekin. Meekin looked at it with an interest that was half suspicion. “ Have I your word that there is nothing in this that might not be read by the Commandant ?”

John Rex was a bold man, but at the sight of the deadly thing fluttering open in the clergyman's hand, his knees knocked together. Strong in his knowledge of human nature, however, he pursued his desperate plan. "Read it, sir," he said, turning away his face reproachfully. "You are a gentleman. I can trust *you*."

"No, Rex," said Meekin, walking loftily into the pitfall; "I do not read private letters." It was sealed, and John Rex felt as if somebody had withdrawn a match from a powder barrel.

In a month, Mr. Meekin received a letter, beautifully written, from "Sarah Rex," stating briefly that she had heard of his goodness, that the enclosed letter was for her husband, and that if it was against the rules to give it him, she begged it might be returned to her unread. Of course Meekin gave it to Rex, who next morning handed to Meekin a most touching and pious production, begging him to read it. Meekin did so, and any suspicions he may have had were at once disarmed. He was ignorant of the fact that the pious letter contained a private one intended for John Rex only, which letter John Rex thought so highly of, that, having read it twice through ***most attentively***, he *ate* it.

The plan of escape was after all a simple one. Sarah Purfoy was to obtain from Blick the moneys he held in trust, and to embark the sum thus obtained in any business which would suffer her to keep a vessel hovering round the southern coast of Van Diemen's Land without exciting suspicion. The escape was to be made in the winter months, if possible, in June or July. The watchful vessel was to be commanded by some trustworthy person, who was to frequently land on the southeastern side, and keep a look-out for any extraordinary appearance along the coast. Rex himself must be left to run the gauntlet of the dogs and guards unaided. "This seems a desperate scheme," wrote Rex, "but it is not so wild as it looks. I have thought over a dozen others, and rejected them all. This is the only way. Consider it well. I have my own plan for escape, which is easy if rescue be at hand. All depends upon placing a trustworthy man in charge of the vessel. You ought to know a dozen such. I will wait eighteen months to give you time to make all arrangements." The eighteen months had now nearly passed over, and the time for the desperate attempt drew near. Faithful to his cruel philosophy, John Rex

had provided scape-goats who, by their vicarious agonies, should assist him to his salvation.

He had discovered that of the twenty men in his gang eight had already determined on an effort for freedom. The names of these eight were Gabbett, Vetch, Bodenham, Cornelius, Greenhill, Sanders called the "Moocher," Cox, and Travers. The leading spirits were Vetch and Gabbett, who, with profound reverence, requested the "Dandy" to join. John Rex, ever suspicious, and feeling repelled by the giant's strange eagerness, at first refused, but by degrees allowed himself to appear to be drawn into the scheme. He would urge these men to their fate, and take advantage of the excitement attendant on their absence to effect his own escape. "While all the island is looking for these eight boobies, I shall have a good chance to slip away unmissed." He wished, however, to have a companion. Some strong man, who, if pressed hard, would turn and keep the pursuers at bay, would be useful without doubt; and this comrade-victim he sought in Rufus Dawes.

Beginning, as we have seen, from a purely selfish motive, to urge his fellow-prisoner to

abscond with him, John Rex gradually found himself attracted into something like friendliness by the sternness with which his overtures were repelled. Always a keen student of human nature, the scoundrel saw beneath the roughness with which it had pleased the unfortunate man to shroud his agony, how faithful a friend and how ardent and undaunted a spirit was concealed. There was, moreover, a mystery about Rufus Dawes which Rex, the reader of hearts, longed to fathom.

“Have you *no* friends whom you would wish to see?” he asked, one evening, when Rufus Dawes had proved more than usually deaf to his arguments.

“No,” said Dawes, gloomily. “My friends are all dead to me.”

“What, all?” asked the other. “Most men have *some one* whom they wish to see.”

Rufus Dawes laughed a slow, heavy laugh. “I am better here.”

“Then, are you content to live this dog’s life?”

“Enough, enough,” said Dawes, “I am resolved.”

“Pooh! Pluck up a spirit,” cried Rex. “It can’t fail. I’ve been thinking of it for eighteen months, and it *can’t* fail.”

“Who are going?” asked the other, his eyes fixed on the ground.

John Rex enumerated the eight, and Dawes raised his head. “I won’t go. I have had two trials at it; I don’t want another. I would advise you not to attempt it either.”

“Why not?”

“Gabbett bolted twice before,” said Rufus Dawes, shuddering at the remembrance of the ghastly object he had seen in the sunlit glen at Hell’s Gates. “Others went with him, but each time he returned *alone*.”

“What do you mean?” asked Rex, struck by the tone of his companion.

“What became of the others?”

“Died, I suppose,” said the Dandy, with a forced laugh.

“Yes; but how? They were all without food. How came the surviving monster to live six weeks?”

John Rex grew a shade paler, and did not reply. He recollected the sanguinary legend that pertained to Gabbett’s rescue. But he did not intend to make the journey in his company, so, after all, he had no cause for fear. “Come with me then,” he said, at length. “We will try our luck together.”

“No. I have resolved. I stay here.”

“And leave your innocence unproved!”

“How can I prove it?” cried Rufus Dawes, roughly impatient. “There are crimes committed which are never brought to light, and this is one of them.”

“Well,” said Rex, rising, as if weary of the discussion, “have it your own way, then. You know best. The private detective game *is* hard work. I, myself, have gone on a wild-goose chase before now. There’s a mystery about a certain shipbuilder’s son which took me four months to unravel, and *then* I lost the thread.”

“*A shipbuilder’s son!* Who was he?”

John Rex paused in wonderment at the eager interest with which the question was put, and then hastened to take advantage of this new opening for conversation. “A queer story. A well-known character in my time—Sir Richard Devine. A miserly old curmudgeon, with a scapegrace son.”

Rufus Dawes bit his lips to avoid showing his emotion. This was the second time that the name of his dead father had been spoken in his hearing. “I think I remember something of him,” he said, with a voice that sounded strangely calm in his own ears.

“A curious story,” said Rex, plunging into

past memories. "Amongst other matters, I dabbled a little in the Private Inquiry line of business, and the old man came to me. He had a son who had gone abroad—a wild young dog, by all accounts—and he wanted particulars of him."

"Did you get them?"

"To a certain extent. I hunted him through Paris into Brussels, from Brussels to Antwerp, from Antwerp back to Paris. I lost him there. A miserable end to a long and expensive search. I got nothing but a portmanteau with a lot of letters from his mother. I sent the particulars to the shipbuilder, and by all accounts the news killed him, for he died not long after."

"And the son?"

"Came to the queerest end of all. The old man had left him his fortune—a large one, I believe—but he'd left Europe, it seems, for India, and was lost in the *Hydaspes*. Frere was his cousin."

"Ah!"

"By Gad, it annoys me when I think of it," continued Rex, feeling, by force of memory, once more the adventurer of fashion. "With the resources I had too! Oh, a miserable failure! The days and nights I've spent

walking about looking for Richard Devine, and never catching a glimpse of him. The old man gave me his son's portrait, with full particulars of his early life, and I suppose I carried that ivory gimcrack in my breast pocket for nearly three months, pulling it out to refresh my memory every half-hour. By Gad, if the young gentleman was anything like his picture, I could have sworn to him if I'd met him in Timbuctoo."

"Do you think you'd know him again?" asked Rufus Dawes in a low voice, turning away his head.

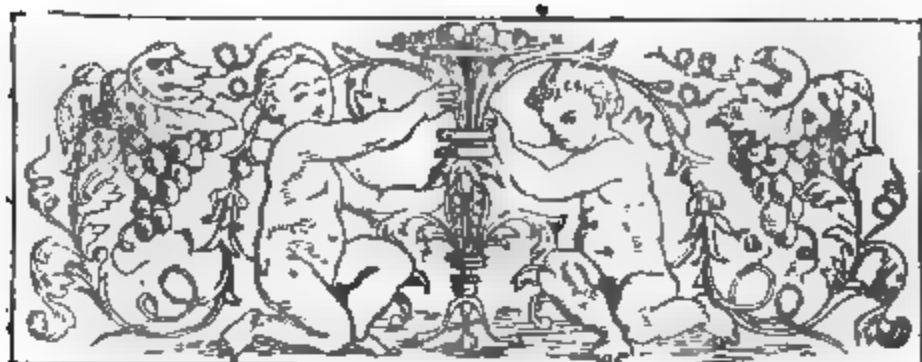
There may have been something in the attitude in which the speaker had put himself that awakened memory, or perhaps the subdued eagerness of the tone, contrasting so strangely with the comparative inconsequence of the theme, had caused John Rex's brain to perform one of those feats of automatic synthesis at which we afterwards wonder. The profligate son—the likeness to the portrait—the mystery of Dawes' life! These were the links of a galvanic chain. He closed the circuit, and a vivid flash revealed to him—
THE MAN.

Warder Troke coming up, put his hand on Rex's shoulder. "Dawes," he said, "you're

wanted at the yard ;” and then, seeing his mistake, added with a grin, “Curse you two ; you’re so much alike one can’t tell t’other from which.”

Rufus Dawes walked off moodily ; but John Rex’s evil face turned pale, and a strange hope made his heart leap.

“Gad, Troke’s right, we are alike. *I’ll not press him to escape any more.*”



CHAPTER XXIII.

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET.

THE *Pretty Mary*—as ugly and evil-smelling a tub as ever pitched under a southerly burster—had been lying on and off Cape Surville for nearly three weeks. Captain Blunt was getting wearied. He made strenuous efforts to find the Oyster-beds of which he was ostensibly in search, but no success attended his efforts. In vain did he take boat and pull into every cove and nook between the Hippolyte Reef and Schouten's Island. In vain did he run the *Pretty Mary* as near to the rugged cliffs as he dared to take her, and make perpetual expeditions to the shore. In vain did he—in his eagerness for the interests of Mrs. Purfoy—clamber up

the rocks, and spend hours in solitary soundings in Blackman's Bay. He never found an oyster. "If I don't find something in three or four days more," said he to his mate, "I shall go back again. It's too dangerous cruising here."

* * * * *

On the same evening that Captain Blunt made this resolution, the watchman at Signal Hill saw the arms of the semaphore at the settlement make three motions, thus:

The semaphore was furnished with three revolving arms, fixed one above the other. The upper one denoted units, and had six motions, indicating ONE to SIX. The middle one denoted tens, TEN to SIXTY. The lower one marked hundreds, from ONE HUNDRED to SIX HUNDRED.

The lower and upper arms whirled out. That meant THREE HUNDRED AND SIX.

A ball ran up to the top of the post. That meant ONE THOUSAND.

Number 1306, or, being interpreted, "PRISONERS ABSCONDED."

"By George, Harry," said Jones, the signalman, "there's a bolt!"

The semaphore signalled again: "Number 1411."

“WITH ARMS!” Jones said, translating as he read. “Come here, Harry! here’s a go!”

But Harry did not reply, and looking down, the watchman saw a dark figure suddenly fill the doorway. The boasted semaphore had failed *this* time at all events. The “bolters” had arrived as soon as the signal!

The man sprang at his carbine, but the intruder had already possessed himself of it. “It’s no use making a fuss, Jones! There are eight of us. Oblige me by attending to your signals.”

Jones knew the voice. It was that of John Rex. “Reply, can’t you?” said Rex, coolly. “Captain Burgess is in a hurry.” The arms of the semaphore at the settlement were, in fact, gesticulating with comical vehemence.

Jones took the strings in his hands, and, with his signal-book open before him, was about to acknowledge the message, when Rex stopped him. “Send *this* message,” he said. “NOT SEEN! SIGNAL SENT TO EAGLEHAWK!”

Jones paused irresolutely. He was himself a convict, and dreaded the inevitable cat, that he knew would follow this false message, “If they finds me out——” he said. Rex cocked the carbine with so decided a meaning in his black eyes, that Jones—who could be brave enough on occasions—banished his hesitation

at once, and began to signal eagerly. There came up a clinking of metal, and a murmur from below. "What's keeping yer, Dandy?"

"All right. Get those irons off, and then we'll talk, boys. I'm putting salt on old Burgess's tail." The rough jest was received with a roar, and Jones, looking momentarily down from his window on the staging, saw, in the waning light, a group of men freeing themselves from their irons with a hammer taken from the guard-house; while two, already freed, were casting buckets of water on the beacon wood-pile. The sentry was lying bound at a little distance.

"Now," said the leader of this surprise party, "signal to Woody Island." Jones perforce obeyed. "Say, 'AN ESCAPE AT THE MINES! WATCH ONE-TREE POINT! SEND ON TO EAGLEHAWK!' Quick, now."

Jones—comprehending at once the force of this manœuvre, which would have the effect of distracting attention from the Neck—executed the order with a grin. "You're a knowing one, Dandy Jack," said he.

John Rex acknowledged the compliment by uncocking the carbine. "Hold out your hands!—Jemmy Vetch!" "Ay, ay," replied the Crow, from beneath. "Come up and tie

our friend Jones. Gabbett, have you got the axes?" "There's only one," said Gabbett, with an oath. "Then bring that, and any tucker you can lay your hands on. Have you tied him? On we go then." And in the space of five minutes from the time when unsuspecting Harry had been silently clutched by two forms, who rushed upon him out of the shadow of the huts, the Signal Hill Station was deserted.

At the settlement Burgess was foaming. Nine men to seize the Long Bay boat, and get half-an-hour's start of the alarm-signal was an unprecedented achievement! What could Warder Troke have been about? Warder Troke, however, found eight hours afterwards, disarmed, gagged, and bound in the scrub, had been guilty of no negligence. How could he tell, that at a certain signal from Dandy Jack, the nine men he had taken to Stewart's Bay would "rush" him; and, before he could draw a pistol, truss him like a chicken? The worst of the gang, Rufus Dawes, had volunteered for the hated duties of pile-driving, and Troke had felt himself secure. How could he possibly guess that there was a plot, in which Rufus Dawes, of all men, had refused to join!

Constables, mounted and on foot, were despatched to scour the bush round the settlement. Burgess, confident from the reply of the Signal Hill semaphore, that the alarm had been given at Eaglehawk Isthmus, promised himself the re-capture of the gang before many hours; and giving orders to keep the communications going, retired to dinner. His convict-servant had barely removed the soup when the result of John Rex's ingenuity became manifest.

The semaphore at Signal Hill had stopped working.

"Perhaps the fools can't see," said Burgess. "Fire the beacon—and saddle my horse." The beacon was fired. All right at Mount Arthur, Mount Communication, and the Coal Mines. To the westward, the line was clear. But at Signal Hill was no answering light. Burgess stamped with rage. "Get me my boat's crew ready; and tell the Mines to signal to Woody Island." As he stood on the jetty, a breathless messenger brought the reply. "A BOAT'S CREW GONE TO ONE-TREE POINT! FIVE MEN SENT FROM EAGLEHAWK IN OBEDIENCE TO ORDERS!" Burgess understood it at once. The fellows had decoyed the Eaglehawk guard. "Give way, men!" And

the boat, shooting into the darkness, made for Long Bay. "I won't be far behind 'em," said the Commandant, "at any rate."

Between Eaglehawk and Signal Hill were, for the absconders, other dangers. Along the indented coast of Port Bunche were four constables' stations. These stations—mere huts within signalling distance of each other—fringed the shore, and to avoid them, it would be necessary to make a circuit into the scrub. Unwilling as he was to lose time, John Rex saw that to attempt to run the gauntlet of these four stations would be destruction. The safety of the party depended upon the reaching of the Neck while the guard was weakened by the absence of some of the men along the southern shore, and before the alarm could be given from the eastern arm of the peninsula. With this view, he ranged his men in single file; and quitting the road near Norfolk Bay, made straight for the Neck. The night had set in with a high westerly wind, and threatened rain. It was pitch dark; and the fugitives were guided only by the dull roar of the sea as it beat upon Descent Beach. Had it not been for the accident of a westerly gale, they would not have had even so much assistance.

The Crow walked first, as guide, carrying a musket taken from Harry. Then came Gabbett, with the axe ; followed by the other six, sharing between them such provisions as they had obtained at Signal Hill. John Rex, with the carbine, and Troke's pistols, walked last. It had been agreed that if attacked, they were to run each one his own way. In their desperate case, disunion was strength. At intervals, on their left, gleamed the lights of the constables' stations, and as they stumbled onward they heard plainer and more plainly the hoarse murmur of the sea, beyond which was liberty or death.

After nearly two hours of painful progress, Jemmy Vetch stopped, and whispered them to approach. They were on a sandy rise. To the left was a black object ;—a constable's hut ; to the right was a dim white line ;—the ocean ; in front was a row of lamps, and between every two lamps leapt and ran a dusky indistinct body. Jemmy Vetch pointed with his lean forefinger.

“ The dogs ! ”

Instinctively they crouched down, lest even at that distance the two sentries, so plainly visible in the red light of the guardhouse fire, should see them.

“Well bo’s,” said Gabbett, “what’s to be done now?”

As he spoke, a long low howl broke from one of the chained hounds, and the whole kennel burst into hideous outcry.

John Rex, who perhaps was the bravest of the party, shuddered. “They have smelt us,” he said. “We must go on.”

Gabbett spat in his palm, and took firmer hold of the axe-handle. “Right you are,” he said. “Ill leave my mark on some of them before this night’s out!”

On the opposite shore lights began to move, and the fugitives could hear the hurrying tramp of feet.

“Make for the right-hand side of the jetty,” said Rex in a fierce whisper. “I think I see a boat there. It is our only chance now. We can never break through the station. Are we ready? Now! All together!”

Gabbett was fast outstripping the others by some three feet of distance. There were eleven dogs, two of whom were placed on stages set out in the water, and they were so chained that their muzzles nearly touched. The giant leapt into the line, and with a blow of his axe split the skull of the beast on his

right hand. This action unluckily took him within reach of the other dog, who seized him by the thigh.

“Fire!” cried McNab from the other side of the lamps.

The giant uttered a cry of rage and pain, and fell with the dog under him. It was, however, the dog who had pulled him down, and the musket-ball intended for him struck Travers in the jaw. The unhappy villain fell—like Virgil’s Dares—“spitting blood, teeth, and curses.”

Gabbett clutched the mastiff’s throat with iron hand, and forced him to loose his hold; then, bellowing with fury, seized his axe and sprang forward, mangled as he was, upon the nearest soldier. Jemmy Vetch had been beforehand with him. Uttering a low snarl of hate, he fired, and shot the sentry through the breast. The others rushed through the now broken cordon, and made headlong for the boat.

“Fools!” cried Rex behind them. “You have wasted a shot! LOOK TO YOUR LEFT!”

Burgess, hurried down the tram-road by his men, had tarried at Signal Hill only long enough to loose the surprised guard from their bonds, and taking the Woody Island

boat, was pulling with a fresh crew to the neck. The reinforcement was not ten yards from the jetty.

The Crow saw the danger, and flinging himself into the water, desperately seized McNab's boat.

"In with you for your lives!" he cried.

Another volley from the guard spattered the water around the fugitives, but in the darkness the ill-aimed bullets fell harmless. Gabbett swung himself over the sheets, and seized an oar.

"Cox, Bodenham, Greenhill! Now, push her off! Jump, Tom, jump!" and as Burgess leapt to land, Cornelius was dragged over the stern, and the whale-boat floated into deep water.

McNab, seeing this, ran down to the water side to aid the Commandant.

"Lift her over the bar, men!" he shouted. "With a will—So!" And raised in twelve strong arms, the pursuing craft slid across the isthmus.

"We've five minutes' start," said Vetch, coolly, as he saw the Commandant take his place in the stern sheets. "Pull away, my jolly boys, and we'll best 'em yet."

The soldiers on the Neck fired again almost at random, but the blaze of their pieces only served to show the Commandant's boat a hundred yards astern of that of the mutineers, which had already gained the deep water of Pirates Bay.

Then, for the first time, the six prisoners became aware that John Rex was not among them.



CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE NIGHT.

JOHAN REX had put into execution the first part of his scheme.

At the moment when, seeing Burgess's boat near the sand-pit, he had uttered the warning cry heard by Vetch, he turned back into the darkness, and made for the water's edge at a point some distance from the Neck. His desperate hope was that, the attention of the guard being concentrated on the escaping boat, he might, favoured by the darkness and the confusion—*swim* to the peninsula. It was not a very marvellous feat to accomplish, and he had confidence in his own powers. Once safe on the peninsula, his plans were formed. But, owing to the

strong westerly wind, which caused an incoming tide upon the isthmus, it was necessary for him to attain some point sufficiently far to the southward to enable him, on taking the water, to be assisted, not impeded, by the current. With this view, he hurried over the sandy hummocks at the entrance to the Neck, and ran backwards towards the sea. In a few strides he had gained the hard and sandy shore, and, pausing to listen, heard behind him the sound of footsteps. He was pursued. The footsteps stopped, and then a voice cried—

“Surrender!”

It was McNab, who, seeing Rex's retreat, had daringly followed him. John Rex drew from his breast Troke's pistol, and waited.

“Surrender!” cried the voice again, and the footsteps advanced two paces.

At the instant that Rex raised the weapon to fire, a vivid flash of lightning showed him, on his right hand, on the ghastly and pallid ocean, two boats, the hindmost one apparently within a few yards of him. The men looked like corpses. In the distance rose Cape Surville, and beneath Cape Surville was the hungry sea. The scene vanished in an instant—swallowed up almost before he had

realised it. But the shock it gave him made him miss his aim, and flinging away the pistol with a curse, he turned down the path and fled. McNab followed.

The path had been made by frequent passage from the Station, and Rex found it tolerably easy running. He had acquired—like most men who live much in the dark—that cat-like perception of obstacles, which is due rather to increased sensitiveness of touch than increased acuteness of vision. His feet accommodated themselves to the inequalities of the ground; his hands instinctively outstretched themselves towards the overhanging boughs; his head ducked of its own accord to any obtrusive sapling which bent to obstruct his progress. His pursuer was not so fortunate. Twice did John Rex laugh mentally, at a crash and scramble that told of a fall, and once—in a valley where trickled a little stream that he had cleared almost without an effort—he heard a splash that made him laugh outright. The track now began to go uphill, and Rex redoubled his efforts, trusting to his superior muscular energy to shake off his pursuer. He breasted the rise, and paused to listen. The crashing of branches behind him had ceased, and it seemed *that he was alone.*

He had gained the summit of the cliff. The lights of the Neck were invisible. Below him lay the sea. Out of the black emptiness came puffs of sharp salt wind. The tops of the rollers that broke below were blown off and whirled away into the night—white patches, swallowed up immediately in the increasing darkness. From the north side of the bay was borne the hoarse roar of the breakers as they dashed against the perpendicular cliffs which guarded Forestier's Peninsula. At his feet arose a frightful shrieking and whistling, broken at intervals by reports like claps of thunder. Where was he? Exhausted and breathless, he sank down into the rough scrub and listened. All at once, on the track over which he had passed, he heard a sound that made him bound to his feet in deadly fear—the bay of a dog!


He thrust his hand to his breast for the remaining pistol, and uttered a cry of alarm. He had dropped it. He felt round about him in the darkness for some stick or stone that might serve as a weapon. In vain. His fingers clutched nothing but prickly scrub and coarse grass. The sweat ran down his face. With staring eyeballs, and bristling hair,

he stared into the darkness, as if he would dissipate it by the very intensity of his gaze. The noise was repeated, and, piercing through the roar of wind and water, above and below him, seemed to be close at hand. He heard a man's voice cheering the dog in accents that the gale blew away from him before he could recognize them. It was probable that some of the soldiers had been sent to the assistance of McNab. Capture, then, was certain. In his agony, the wretched man almost promised himself repentance, should he escape this peril. The dog, crashing through the underwood, gave one short, sharp howl, and then ran mute.

The darkness had increased with the gale. The wind, ravaging the hollow heaven, had spread between the lightnings and the sea an impenetrable curtain of black cloud. It seemed possible to seize upon this curtain and draw its edge yet closer, so dense was it. The white and raging waters were blotted out, and even the lightning seemed unable to penetrate that intense blackness. A large, warm drop of rain fell upon Rex's outstretched hand, and far overhead rumbled a wrathful peal of thunder. The shrieking which he had heard a few moments ago had

ceased, but every now and then dull but immense shocks, as of some mighty bird flapping the cliff with monstrous wings, reverberated around him, and shook the ground where he stood. He looked towards the ocean, and a tall, misty Form—white against the all-pervading blackness—beckoned and bowed to him. He saw it distinctly for an instant, and then, with an awful shriek, as of wrathful despair, it sank and vanished. Madened with a terror he could not define, the hunted man turned to meet the material peril that was so close at hand.

With a ferocious gasp, the dog flung himself upon him. John Rex was borne backwards, but, in his desperation, he clutched the beast by the throat and belly, and exerting all his strength, flung him off. The brute uttered one howl, and seemed to lie where he had fallen; while above his carcase again hovered that white and vaporous column. It was strange that McNab and the soldier did not follow up the advantage they had gained. Courage—perhaps he should defeat them yet! He had been lucky to dispose of the dog so easily. With a fierce thrill of renewed hope, he ran forward; when at his feet, in his face, arose that misty Form, breathing chill warn-



ing, as though to wave him back. The terror at his heels drove him on. A few steps more, and he should gain the summit of the cliff. He could *feel* the sea roaring in front of him in the gloom. The column disappeared; and in a lull of wind, uprose from the place where it had been such a hideous medley of shrieks, laughter and exultant wrath, that John Rex paused in horror. Too late. The ground gave way—it seemed—beneath his feet. He was falling—clutching, in vain, at rocks, shrubs, and grass. The cloud-curtain lifted, and by the lightning that leapt and played about the ocean, John Rex found an explanation of his terrors, more terrible than they themselves had been. The track he had followed led to that portion of the cliff in which the sea had excavated the tunnel-spout known as the Devil's Blow-Hole.

Clinging to a tree that, growing half way down the precipice, had arrested his course, he stared into the abyss. Before him—already high above his head—was a gigantic arch of cliff. Through this arch he saw, at an immense distance below him, the raging and pallid ocean. Beneath him was an abyss splintered with black rocks, turbid and raucous with tortured water. Suddenly the bottom

of this abyss seemed to advance to meet him; or, rather, the black throat of the chasm belched a volume of leaping, curling water, which mounted to drown him. Was it fancy that showed him, on the surface of the rising column, the mangled carcase of the dog?

The chasm into which John Rex had fallen was shaped like a huge funnel set up on its narrow end. The sides of this funnel were rugged rock, and in the banks of earth lodged here and there upon projections, a scrubby vegetation grew. The scanty growth paused abruptly half way down the gulf, and the rock below was perpetually damp from the up-thrown spray. Accident—had the convict been a Meekin, we might term it Providence—had lodged him on the lowest of these banks of earth. In calm weather he would have been out of danger, but the lightning flash revealed to his terror-sharpened senses a black patch of dripping rock on the side of the chasm some ten feet above his head. It was evident that upon the next rising of the water-spout the place where he stood would be covered with water.

The roaring column mounted with hideous swiftness. Rex felt it rush at him and swing him upward. With both arms round the tree,

he clutched the sleeves of his jacket with either hand. Perhaps if he could maintain his hold, he might outlive the shock of that suffocating torrent. He felt his feet rudely seized, as though by the hand of a giant, and plucked upwards. Water gurgled in his ears. His arms seemed about to be torn from their sockets. Had the strain lasted another instant, he must have loosed his hold; but, with a wild, hoarse shriek, as though it was some sea-monster baffled of its prey, the column sank, and left him gasping, bleeding, half drowned, but alive. It was impossible that he could survive another shock, and in his agony he unclasped his stiffened fingers, determined to resign himself to his fate. At that instant, however, he saw on the wall of rock that hollowed on his right hand, a red and lurid light, in the midst of which fantastically bobbed hither and thither the gigantic shadow of a man. He cast his eyes upwards and saw, slowly descending into the gulf, a blazing bush tied to a rope. McNab was taking advantage of the pause in the spouting to examine the sides of the Blow-hole.

A despairing hope seized John Rex. In another instant the light would reveal his figure, clinging like a limpet to the rock, to

those above. He must be detected in any case ; but if they could lower the rope sufficiently quickly, he might clutch it and be saved. His dread of the horrible death that was beneath him overcame his resolution to avoid recapture. The long-drawn agony of the retreating water as it was sucked back again into the throat of the chasm had ceased, and he knew that the next tremendous pulsation of the sea below would hurl the spuming destruction up upon him. The gigantic torch slowly descended, and he had already drawn in his breath for a shout which should make itself heard above the roar of the wind and water, when a strange appearance on the face of the cliff made him pause. About six feet from him—glowing like molten gold in the gusty glow of the burning tree—a round, sleek stream of water slipped from the rock into the darkness, like a serpent from its hole. Above this stream a dark spot defied the torch-light, and John Rex felt his heart leap with one last desperate hope as he comprehended that close to him was one of those tortuous drives which the worm-like action of the sea bores in such caverns as that in which he found himself. The drive, opened first to the light of the day by the natural convulsion which had

raised the mountain itself above ocean level, probably extended into the bowels of the cliff. The stream ceased to let itself out of the crevice; it was then likely that the rising column of water did not penetrate far into this wonderful hiding-place.

Endowed with a wisdom, which in one placed in less desperate position would have been madness, John Rex shouted to his pursuers, "The rope! the rope!" The words, projected against the sides of the enormous funnel, were pitched high above the blast, and, reduplicated by a thousand echoes, reached the ears of those above.

"He's alive!" cried McNab, peering into the abyss. "I see him. Look!"

The soldier whipped the end of the bullock-hide lariat round the tree to which he held, and began to oscillate it, so that the blazing bush might reach the ledge on which the daring convict sustained himself. The groan which preceded the fierce belching forth of the torrent was cast up to them from below.

"God be gude to the puir felly!" said the pious young Scotchman, catching his breath.


A white spume was visible at the bottom of the gulf, and the groan changed into a rapidly increasing bellow. John Rex, eyeing the blaz-

ing pendulum, that with longer and longer swing momentarily neared him, looked up to the black heaven for the last time, with a muttered prayer. The bush—the flame fanned by the motion—flung a crimson glow upon his frowning features, which as he caught the rope had a sneer of triumph on them. “Slack out! slack out!” he cried; and then, drawing the burning bush towards him, attempted to stamp out the fire with his feet.

The soldier set his body against the tree trunk, and gripped the rope hard, turning his head away from the fiery pit below him. “Hold tight, your honour,” he muttered to McNab. “She’s coming!”

The bellow changed into a roar, the roar into a shriek, and with a gust of wind and spray, the seething sea leapt up out of the gulf.

John Rex, unable to extinguish the flame, twisted his arm about the rope, and the instant before the surface of the rising water made a momentary floor to the mouth of the cavern, he spurned the cliff desperately with his feet, and flung himself across the chasm. He had already clutched the rock, and thrust himself forward, when the tremendous volume of water struck him. McNab and the soldier felt the sudden pluck of the rope and saw the



light swing across the abyss. Then the fury of the waterspout burst with a triumphant scream, the tension ceased, the light was blotted out, and when the column sank, there dangled at the end of the lariat nothing but the drenched and blackened skeleton of the she-oak bough. Amid a terrific peal of thunder, the long pent-up rain descended, and a sudden ghastly rending asunder of the clouds showed far below them the heaving ocean, high above them the jagged and glistening rocks, and at their feet the black and murderous abyss of the Blow-hole—empty!

They pulled up the useless rope in silence; and another dead tree lighted and lowered showed them nothing.

“God rest his puir soul,” said McNab, shuddering. “He’s oot o’ our han’s.”



CHAPTER XXV.

THE FLIGHT.

GABBETT, guided by the Crow, had determined to beach the captured boat on the southern point of Cape Surville. It will be seen by those who have followed the description of the topography of Colonel Arthur's Penitentiary, that nothing but the desperate nature of the attempt could have justified so desperate a measure. The perpendicular cliffs seemed to render such an attempt certain destruction; but Vetch, who had been employed in building the pier at the Neck, knew that on the southern point of the promontory was a strip of beach, upon which the company might, by good fortune, land in safety. With something

of the decision of his leader, Rex, the Crow determined at once that in their desperate plight this was the only measure, and setting his teeth as he seized the oar that served as a rudder, he put the boat's head straight for the huge rock that formed the northern horn of Pirates' Bay.

Save for the faint phosphorescent radiance of the foaming waves, the darkness was intense, and Burgess for some minutes pulled almost at random in pursuit. The same tremendous flash of lightning which had saved the life of McNab, by causing Rex to miss his aim, showed to the Commandant the whale-boat balanced on the summit of an enormous wave, and apparently about to be flung against the wall of rock which—magnified in the sudden flash—seemed frightfully near to them. The next instant Burgess himself—his boat lifted by the swiftly advancing billow—saw a wild waste of raging sea scooped into abysmal troughs, in which the bulk of a leviathan might wallow. At the bottom of one of these valleys of water lay the mutineers' boat, looking, with its outspread oars, like some six-legged insect floating in a pool of ink. The great cliff, whose every scar and crag was as distinct as though its huge bulk

was but a yard distant, seemed to shoot out from its base towards the struggling insect, a broad, flat straw, that was a strip of dry land. The next instant the rushing water, carrying the six-legged atom with it, creamed up over this strip of beach ; the giant crag, amid the thunder-crash which followed upon the lightning, appeared to stoop down over the ocean, and as it stooped, the billow rolled onwards, the boat glided down into the depths, and the whole phantasmagoria was swallowed up in the tumultuous darkness of the tempest.

Burgess—his hair bristling with terror—shouted to put the boat about, but he might with as much reason have shouted at an avalanche. The wind blew his voice away, and emptied it violently into the air. A snarling billow jerked the oar from his hand. Despite the desperate efforts of the soldiers, the boat was whirled up the mountain of water like a leaf on a water-spout, and a second flash of lightning showed them what seemed a group of dolls struggling in the surf, and a walnutshell bottom upwards was driven by the recoil of the waves towards them. For an instant all thought that they must share the fate which had overtaken the unlucky convicts ; but Burgess succeeded in trimming

the boat, and, awed by the peril he had so narrowly escaped, gave the order to return. As the men set the boat's head to the welcome line of lights that marked the Neck, a black spot balanced upon a black line was swept under their stern and carried out to the sea. As it swooped past them, this black spot emitted a cry, and they knew that it was one of the shattered boat's crew clinging to an oar.

"He was the only one of 'em alive," said Burgess, bandaging his sprained wrist two hours afterwards at the Neck, "and he's food for the fishes by this time!"

He was mistaken, however. Fate had in reserve for the crew of villains a less merciful death than that of drowning. Aided by the lightning, and that wonderful "good luck" which urges villany to its destruction, Vetch beached the boat, and the party, bruised and bleeding, reached the upper portion of the shore in safety. Of all this number only Cox was lost. He was pulling stroke-oar, and being something of a laggard, stood in the way of the Crow, who, seeing the importance of haste in preserving his own skin, plucked the man backwards by the collar, and passed over his sprawling body to the shore

Cox, grasping at anything to save himself, clutched an oar, and the next moment found himself borne out with the overturned whale-boat by the under-tow. He was drifted past his only hope of rescue—the guard-boat—with a velocity that forbade all attempts at rescue, and almost before the poor scoundrel had time to realize his condition, he was in the best possible way of escaping the hanging that his comrades had so often humorously prophesied for him. Being a strong and vigorous villain, however, he clung tenaciously to his oar, and even unbuckling his leather belt, passed it round the slip of wood that was his salvation, girding himself to it as firmly as he was able. In this condition, *plus* a swoon from exhaustion, he was descried by the helmsman of the *Pretty Mary*, a few miles from Cape Surville, at daylight next morning. Blunt, with a wild hope that this waif and stray might be the lover of Sarah Purfoy, *dead*, lowered a boat and picked him up. Nearly bisected by the belt, gorged with salt water, frozen with cold, and having two ribs broken, the victim of Vetch's murderous quickness retained sufficient life to survive. Blunt's remedies for nearly two hours. During that time he stated that his name was

Cox, that he had escaped from Port Arthur with eight others, that John Rex was the leader of the expedition, that the others were all drowned, and that he believed John Rex had been retaken. Having placed Blunt in possession of these particulars, he further said that it pricked him to breathe, cursed Jemmy Vetch, the settlement, and the sea, and so impenitently died.

Blunt smoked three pipes, and then altered the course of the *Pretty Mary* two points to the eastward, and ran for the coast. It was possible that the man for whom he was searching had not been retaken, and was now awaiting his arrival. It was clearly his duty—hearing of the planned escape having been actually attempted—not to give up the expedition while hope remained.

“I’ll take one more look along,” said he to himself.

The *Pretty Mary*, hugging the coast as closely as she dared, crawled in the thin breeze all day, and saw nothing. It would be madness to land at Cape Surville, for the whole station would be on the alert ; so Blunt, as night was falling, stood off a little across the mouth of Pirates’ Bay. He was walking the deck, groaning at the folly of the expedi-

tion, when a strange appearance on the southern horn of the bay made him come to a sudden halt. There was a furnace blazing in the bowels of the mountain ! Blunt rubbed his eyes and stared. He looked at the man at the helm.

“ Do you see anything yonder, Jem ? ”

Jem—a Sydney man, who had never been round that coast before—briefly remarked, “ Lighthouse.”

Blunt stumped into the cabin and got out his charts. No lighthouse was laid down there, only a mark like an anchor, and a note, “ Remarkable Hole at this Point.” A remarkable hole indeed ; a remarkable “ lime kiln ” would have been more to the purpose !

Blunt called up his mate, William Staples, a fellow whom Sarah Purfoy’s gold had bought body and soul. William Staples looked at the waxing and waning glow for a while, and then said, in tones trembling with greed, “ It’s a fire. Lie to, and lower away the jolly-boat. Old man, that’s our bird for a thousand pounds ! ”

The *Pretty Mary* shortened sail, and Blunt and Staples got into the jolly-boat.

“ Goin’ a hoysterin’, sir ? ” said one of the crew, with a grin, as Blunt threw a bundle *into the stern-sheets*.

Staples thrust his tongue into his cheek. The object of the voyage was now pretty well understood among the carefully picked crew. Blunt had not chosen men who were likely to betray him, though, for that matter, Rex had suggested a precaution which rendered betrayal almost impossible.

"What's in the bundle, old man?" asked Will Staples, after they had got clear of the ship.

"Clothes," returned Blunt. "We can't bring him off, if it is him, in his canaries. He puts on these duds, d'ye see, sinks Her Majesty's livery, and comes aboard, a 'shipwrecked mariner.'"

"That's well thought of. Whose notion's that? The Madam's, I'll be bound."

"Ay."

"She's a knowing one."

And the sinister laughter of the pair floated across the violet water.

"Go easy, man," said Blunt, as they neared the shore. "They're all awake at Eaglehawk; and if those cursed dogs give tongue, there'll be a boat out in a twinkling. It's lucky the wind's off shore."

Staples lay on his oar and listened. The night was moonless, and the ship had already

disappeared from view. They were approaching the promontory from the south-east, and the isthmus of the guarded Neck was hidden by the outlying cliff. In the south-western angle of this cliff, about midway between the summit and the sea, was an arch, which vomited a red and flickering light, that faintly shone upon the sea in the track of the boat. The light was lambent and uncertain, now sinking almost into insignificance, and now leaping up with a fierceness that caused a deep glow to throb in the very heart of the mountain. Sometimes a black figure would pass across this gigantic furnace-mouth, stooping and rising, as though feeding the fire. One might have imagined that a door in Vulcan's Smithy had been left inadvertently open, and that the old hero was forging arms for a demigod.

Blunt turned pale. "It's no mortal," he whispered. "Let's go back."

"And what will Madam say?" returned dare-devil Will Staples, who would have plunged into Mount Erebus had he been paid for it. Thus appealed to in the name of his ruling passion, Blunt turned his head, and the boat sped onward.



CHAPTER XXVI.

THE WORK OF THE SEA.

THE lift of the water-spout had saved John Rex's life. At the moment when it struck him he was on his hands and knees at the entrance of the cavern. The wave, gushing upwards, at the same time expanded, laterally, and this lateral force drove the convict into the mouth of the subterlapiian passage. The passage trended downwards, and for some seconds he was rolled over and over, the rush of water wedging him at length into a crevice between two enormous stones, which overhung a still more formidable abyss. Fortunately for the preservation of his hard-fought-for life, this very fury of incoming water prevented him from being washed out

again with the recoil of the wave. He could hear the water dashing with frightful echoes far down into the depths beyond him, but it was evident that the two stones against which he had been thrust acted as breakwaters to the torrent poured in from the outside, and repelled the main body of the stream in the fashion he had observed, from his position on the ledge. In a few seconds the cavern was empty.


Painfully extricating himself, and feeling as yet doubtful of his safety, John Rex essayed to climb the twin-blocks that barred the unknown depths below him. The first movement he made caused him to shriek aloud. His left arm—with which he clung to the rope—hung powerless. Ground against the ragged entrance, it was momentarily paralyzed. For an instant the unfortunate wretch sank despairingly on the wet and rugged floor of the cave; then a terrible gurgling beneath his feet warned him of the approaching torrent, and collecting all his energies, he scrambled up the incline. Though nigh fainting with pain and exhaustion, he pressed desperately higher and higher. He heard the hideous shriek of the whirlpool which was beneath him grow louder and louder. He saw the

darkness grow darker as the rising water-spout covered the mouth of the cave. He felt the salt spray sting his face, and the wrathful tide lick the hand that hung over the shelf on which he fell. But that was all. He was out of danger at last! And as the thought blessed his senses, his eyes closed, and the wonderful courage and strength which had sustained the villain so long exhaled in stupor.

When he awoke the cavern was filled with the soft light of dawn. Raising his eyes, he beheld, high above his head, a roof of rock, on which the reflection of the sunbeams, playing upwards through a pool of water, cast flickering colours. On his right hand was the mouth of the cave, on his left a terrific abyss, at the bottom of which he could hear the sea faintly lapping and washing. He raised himself and stretched his stiffened limbs. Despite his injured shoulder, it was imperative that he should bestir himself. He knew not if his escape had been noticed, or if the cavern had another inlet, by which McNab returning might penetrate. Moreover, he was wet and famished. To preserve the life which he had torn from the sea, he must have fire and food.

First he examined the crevice by which he had entered. It was shaped like an irregular triangle, hollowed at the base by the action of the water which in such storms as that of the preceding night was forced into it by the rising of the sea. John Rex dared not crawl too near the edge, lest he should slide out of the damp and slippery orifice, and be dashed upon the rocks at the bottom of the Blow-hole. Craning his neck, he could see, a hundred feet below him, the sullenly frothing water, gurgling, spouting, and creaming, in huge turbid eddies, occasionally leaping upwards as though it longed for another storm to send it raging up to the man who had escaped its fury. It was impossible to get down that way. He turned back into the cavern, and began to explore in that direction.

The twin-rocks against which he had been hurled were, in fact, pillars which supported the roof of the water-drive. Beyond them lay a great grey shadow which was emptiness, faintly illumined by the sea-light cast up through the bottom of the gulf. Midway across the grey shadow fell a strange beam of dusky brilliance, which cast its flickering light upon a wilderness of waving sea-weeds.



Even in the desperate position in which he found himself, there survived in the vagabond's nature sufficient poetry to make him value the natural marvel upon which he had so strangely stumbled. The immense promontory, which, viewed from the outside, seemed as solid as a mountain, was in reality but a hollow cone, reft and split into a thousand fissures by the unsuspected action of the sea for centuries. The Blow-hole was but an insignificant cranny compared with this enormous chasm. Descending with difficulty the steep incline, he found himself on the brink of a gallery of rock, which, jutting out over the pool, bore on its moist and weed-bearded edges signs of frequent submersion. It must be low tide without the rock. Clinging to the rough and root-like algæ that fringed the ever-moist walls, John Rex crept round the projection of the gallery, and passed at once from dimness to daylight. There was a broad loop-hole in the side of the honey-combed and wave-perforated cliff. The cloudless heaven expanded above him ; a fresh breeze kissed his cheek, and, sixty feet below him, the sea wrinkled all its lazy length, sparkling in myriad wavelets beneath the bright beams of morning. Not a sign of the recent tempest marred the ex-

quisite harmony of the picture. Not a sign of human life gave evidence of the grim neighbourhood of the prison. From the recess out of which he peered nothing was visible but a sky of turquoise smiling upon a sea of sapphire.

This placidity of Nature was, however, to the hunted convict a new source of alarm. It was a reason why the Blow-hole and its neighbourhood should be thoroughly searched. He guessed that the favourable weather would be an additional inducement to Mac-Nab and Burgess to satisfy themselves as to the fate of their late prisoner. He turned from the opening, and prepared to descend still farther into the rocky pathway. The sunshine had revived and cheered him, and a sort of instinct told him that the cliff so honey-combed above, could not be without some gully or chink at its base, which at low tide would give upon the rocky shore. It grew darker as he descended, and twice he almost turned back in dread of the gulfs on either side of him. It seemed to him, also, that the gullet of weed-clad rock through which he was crawling doubled upon itself, and led only into the bowels of the mountain. Gnawed by hunger, and conscious that

in a few hours at most the rising tide would fill the subterranean passage and cut off his retreat, he pushed desperately onwards. He had descended some ninety feet, and had lost, in the devious windings of his downward path, all but the reflection of the light from the gallery, when he was rewarded by a glimpse of sunshine striking upwards. He parted two enormous masses of seaweed, whose bubble-beaded fronds hung curtain-wise across his path, and found himself in the very middle of the narrow cleft of rock through which the sea was driven to the Blow-hole.

At an immense distance above him was the arch of cliff. Beyond that arch appeared a segment of the ragged edge of the circular opening, down which he had fallen. He looked in vain for the funnel-mouth whose friendly shelter had received him. It was now indistinguishable. At his feet was a long reft in the solid rock, so narrow that he could almost have leapt across it. This reft was the channel of a swift black current which ran from the sea for fifty yards under an arch eight feet high, until it broke upon the jagged rocks that lay blistering in the sunshine at the bottom of the circular open-

ing in the upper cliff. A shudder shook the limbs of the adventurous convict. He comprehended that at high tide the place where he stood was under water, and that the narrow cavern became a subaqueous pipe of solid rock forty feet long, through which were spouted the league-long rollers of the Southern Sea.

The narrow strip of rock at the base of the cliff was as flat as a table. Here and there were enormous hollows like pans, which the retreating tide had left full of clear, still water. The crannies of the rock were inhabited by small white crabs, and John Rex found to his delight that there was on this little shelf abundance of mussels, which, though lean and acrid, were sufficiently grateful to his famished stomach. Attached to the flat surfaces of the numerous stones, moreover, were coarse limpets. These, however, John Rex found too salt to be palatable, and was compelled to reject them. A larger variety, however, having a succulent body as thick as a man's thumb, contained in long razor-shaped shells, were in some degree free from this objection, and he soon collected the materials for a meal. Having eaten and sunned himself, he began to examine the enormous rock,

to the base of which he had so strangely penetrated. Rugged and worn, it raised its huge breast against wind and wave, secure upon a broad pedestal, which probably extended as far beneath the sea as the massive column itself rose above it. Rising thus, with its shaggy drapery of sea-weed clinging about its knees, it seemed to be a motionless but sentient being—some monster of the deep, a Titan of the ocean condemned ever to front in silence the fury of that illimitable and rarely travelled sea. Yet—silent and motionless as he was—the hoary ancient gave hint of the mysteries of his revenge. Standing upon the broad and sea-girt platform where surely no human foot but his had ever stood in life, the convict saw many feet above him, pitched into a cavity of the huge sun-blistered boulders, an object which his sailor eye told him at once was part of the top hamper of some large ship. Crusted with shells, and its ruin so overrun with the ivy of the ocean, that its ropes could barely be distinguished from the weeds with which they were encumbered, this relic of human labour attested the triumph of nature over human ingenuity. Perforated below by the relentless sea, exposed above to the full fury of the

tempest; set in solitary defiance to the waves, that rolling from the ice-volcano of the Southern pole, hurled their gathered might unchecked upon its iron front, the great rock drew from its lonely warfare the materials of its own silent vengeance. Clasped in iron arms, it held its prey, snatched from the jaws of the all-devouring sea. One might imagine that, when the doomed ship, with her crew of shrieking souls, had splintered and gone down, the deaf, blind giant had clutched this fragment, upheaved from the seething waters, with a thrill of savage and terrible joy.

John Rex, gazing up at this memento of a forgotten agony, felt a sensation of the most vulgar pleasure. "There's wood for my fire!" thought he; and mounting to the spot, he essayed to fling down the splinters of timber upon the platform. Long exposed to the sun, and flung high above the water-mark of recent storms, the timber had dried to the condition of touchwood, and would burn fiercely. It was precisely what he required. Strange accident that had for years stored, upon a desolate rock, this fragment of a vanished and long-forgotten vessel, that it might aid at last to warm the limbs of a villain *escaping from justice!*

Striking the disintegrated mass with his iron-shod heel, John Rex broke off convenient portions ; and making a bag of his shirt, by tying the sleeves and neck, he was speedily staggering into the cavern with a supply of fuel. He made two trips, flinging down the wood in the floor of the gallery that overlooked the sea, and was returning for a third, when his quick ear caught the dip of oars. He had barely time to lift the sea-weed curtain that veiled the entrance to the chasm, when the Eaglehawk boat rounded the promontory. Burgess was in the stern-sheets, and seemed to be making signals to some one on the top of the cliff. Rex, grinning behind his veil, divined the manœuvre. McNab and his party were to search above, while the Commandant examined the gulf below. The boat headed direct for the passage, and, for an instant, John Rex's undaunted soul shivered at the thought that, perhaps after all, his pursuers might be aware of the existence of the cavern. Yet that was unlikely. He kept his ground, and the boat passed within a foot of him, gliding silently into the gulf. He observed that Burgess's usually florid face was pale, and that his left sleeve was cut open, showing a bandage on the arm. There had

been some fighting, then, and it was not unlikely that his fellow-desperadoes had been captured! He chuckled at his own ingenuity and good sense. The boat, emerging from the archway, entered the pool of the Blow-hole, and, held with the full strength of the party, remained stationary. John Rex watched Burgess scan the rocks and eddies, saw him signal to McNab, and then, with much relief, beheld the boat's head brought round to the sea-board.

He was so intent upon watching this dangerous and difficult operation, that he was oblivious of an extraordinary change which had taken place in the interior of the cavern. The water, which, an hour ago, had left exposed a long reef of black hummock-rocks, was now spread in one foam-flecked sheet over the ragged bottom of the rude staircase by which he had descended. The tide had turned, and the sea, apparently sucked in through some deeper tunnel in the portion of the cliff which was below water, was being forced into the vault with a rapidity which bid fair to shortly submerge the mouth of the cave. The convict's feet were already wetted by the incoming waves, and as he turned for one last look at the boat, he saw a green

billow heave up against the entrance to the chasm, and, almost blotting out the daylight, roll majestically through the arch. It was high time for Burgess to take his departure if he did not wish his whale-boat to be cracked like a nut against the roof of the tunnel. Alive to his danger, the Commandant abandoned the search after his late prisoner's corpse, and hastened to gain the open sea. The boat, carried backwards and upwards on the bosom of a monstrous wave, narrowly escaped destruction, and John Rex, climbing to the gallery, saw with much satisfaction the broad back of his outwitted gaoler disappear round the sheltering promontory. The last efforts of his pursuers had failed, and in another hour the only accessible entrance to the convict's retreat was hidden under three feet of furious sea-water.

His gaolers were convinced of his death, and would search for him no more. So far, so good. Now for the last desperate venture—the escape from the wonderful cavern which was at once his shelter and his prison. Piling his wood together, and succeeding after many efforts, by aid of a flint and the ring which yet clung to his ankle, in lighting a fire, and warming his chilled limbs in its cheering blaze,

he set himself to meditate upon his course of action. He was safe for the present, and the supply of food that the rock afforded was amply sufficient to sustain life in him for many days, but it was impossible that he could remain for many days concealed. He had no fresh water, and though, by reason of the soaking he had received, he had hitherto felt little inconvenience from this cause, the salt and acrid mussels speedily induced a raging thirst, which he could not alleviate. It was imperative that within forty-eight hours at farthest he should be on his way to the peninsula. He remembered the little stream into which—in his flight of the previous night—he had so nearly fallen, and hoped to be able, under cover of the darkness, to steal round the reef and reach it unobserved. His desperate scheme was then to commence. He had to run the gauntlet of the dogs and guards, gain the peninsula, and await the rescuing vessel. He confessed to himself that the chances were terribly against him. If Gabbett and the others had been recaptured—as he devoutly trusted—the coast would be comparatively clear; but if they had escaped, he knew Burgess too well to think that he would give up the chase while hope of re-

taking the absconders remained to him. If indeed all fell out as he had wished, he had still to sustain life until Blunt found him—if haply Blunt had not returned, wearied with useless and dangerous waiting.

As night came on, and the firelight showed strange shadows waving from the corners of the enormous vault, while the dismal abysses beneath him murmured and muttered with uncouth and ghastly utterances, there fell upon the lonely man the terror of Solitude. Was this marvellous hiding place that he had discovered to be his sepulchre? Was he—a monster among his fellow-men—to die some monstrous death, entombed in this mysterious and terrible cavern of the sea? He tried to drive away these gloomy thoughts by sketching out for himself a plan of action—but in vain. In vain he strove to picture in its completeness that—as yet vague—design by which he promised himself to wrest from the vanished son of the wealthy shipbuilder his name and heritage. His mind, filled with forebodings of shadowy horror, could not give to the subject the calm consideration which it needed. In the midst of his schemes for the baffling of the jealous love of the woman who was to save him, and the getting to England,

in shipwrecked and foreign guise, as the long-lost heir to the fortune of Sir Richard Devine, there arose ghastly and awesome shapes of death and horror, with whose terrible unsubstantiality he must grapple in the lonely recesses of that dismal cavern. He heaped fresh wood upon his fire, that the bright light might drive out the gruesome things that lurked above, below, and around him. He became afraid to look behind him, lest some shapeless mass of mid-sea birth—some voracious polyp, with far-reaching arms and jellied mouth ever open to devour—might slide up over the edge of the dripping caves below, and fasten upon him in the darkness. His imagination—always sufficiently vivid, and spurred to unnatural effect by the exciting scenes of the previous night—painted each patch of shadow, clinging bat-like to the humid wall, as some globular sea-spider ready to drop upon him with its viscid and clay-cold body, and drain out his chilled blood, enfolding him in rough and hairy arms. Each splash in the water beneath him, each sigh of the multitudinous and melancholy sea, seemed to prelude the laborious advent of some misshapen and ungainly abortion of the ooze. All the sensations induced by lapping water and regurgi-

tating waves took material shape and surrounded him. All creatures that could be engendered by slime and salt crept forth into the firelight to stare at him. Red dabs and splashes that were living beings, having a strange phosphoric light of their own, glowed upon the floor. The livid encrustations of a hundred years of humidity slipped from off the walls and painfully heaved their mushroom surfaces to the blaze. The red glow of the unwonted fire, crimsoning the wet sides of the cavern, seemed to attract countless blisterous and transparent shapelessnesses, which elongated themselves towards him. Bloodless and bladdery things ran hither and thither noiselessly. Strange carapaces crawled from out of the rocks. All the horrible unseen life of the ocean seemed to be rising up and surrounding him. He retreated to the brink of the gulf, and the glare of the upheld brand fell upon a rounded hummock, whose coronal of silky weed out-floating in the water looked like the head of a drowned man. He rushed to the entrance of the gallery, and his shadow, thrown into the opening, took the shape of an avenging phantom, with arms upraised to warn him back.

The naturalist, the explorer, or the ship-

wrecked seaman would have found nothing frightful in this exhibition of the harmless life of the Australian ocean. But the convict's guilty conscience, long suppressed and derided, asserted itself in this hour when it was alone with Nature and Night. The bitter intellectual power which had so long supported him succumbed beneath imagination—the unconscious religion of the soul. If ever he was nigh repentance it was then. Phantoms of his past crimes gibbered at him, and covering his eyes with his hands, he fell shuddering upon his knees. The brand, loosening from his grasp, dropped into the gulf, and was extinguished with a hissing noise. As if the sound had called up some spirit that lurked below, a whisper ran through the cavern.

“John Rex!”

The hair of the convict's flesh stood up, and he cowered to the earth.

“John Rex!”

It was a *human* voice! Whether of friend or enemy he did not pause to think. His terror over-mastered all other considerations.

“Here! here!” he cried, and sprang to the opening of the vault.

Arrived at the foot of the cliff, Blunt and

Staples found themselves in almost complete darkness, for the light of the mysterious fire, which had hitherto guided them, had necessarily disappeared. Calm as was the night, and still as was the ocean, the sea yet ran with silent but dangerous strength through the channel which led to the Blow-hole; and Blunt, instinctively feeling the boat drawn towards some unknown peril, held off the shelf of rocks out of reach of the current. A sudden flash of fire, as from a flourished brand, burst out above them, and floating downwards through the darkness, in erratic circles, came an atom of burning wood. Surely no one but a hunted man would lurk in such a savage retreat.

Blunt, in desperate anxiety, determined to risk all upon one venture. "John Rex!" he shouted up through his rounded hands. The light flashed again at the eye-hole of the mountain, and on the point above them appeared a wild figure, holding in its hands a burning log, whose fierce glow illumined a face so contorted by deadly fear and agony of expectation, that it was scarce human.

"Here! here!"

"The poor devil seems half-crazy," said Will Staples, under his breath; and then aloud, "We're FRIENDS!"

A few moments sufficed to explain matters. The terrors which had oppressed John Rex disappeared in human presence, and the villain's coolness returned. Kneeling on the rock platform, he held parley.

"It is impossible for me to come down now," he said. "The tide covers the only way out of the cavern."

"Can't you dive through it?" said Will Staples.

"No, nor you neither," said Rex, shuddering at the thought of trusting himself to that horrible whirlpool.

"What's to be done? You can't come done that *wall*."

"Wait until morning," returned Rex, coolly. "It will be dead low tide at seven o'clock. You must send a boat at six, or thereabouts. It will be low enough for me to get out, I dare say, by that time."

"But the Guard?"

"——Won't come here, my man. They've got their work to do in watching the Neck and exploring after my mates. They won't come here. Besides, I'm dead."

"Dead!"

"Thought to be so, which is as well—better for me, perhaps. If they don't see *your ship, or your boat*, you're safe enough."

“ I don’t like to risk it,” said Blunt. “ It’s Life if we’re caught, remember.”

“ It’s Death if *I’m* caught !” returned the other, with a sinister laugh. “ But there’s no danger if you are cautious. No one looks for rats in a terrier’s kennel, and there’s not a station along the beach from here to Cape Pillar. Take your vessel out of eye-shot of the Neck, bring the boat up Descent Beach, and the thing’s done.”

“ Well,” says Blunt, “ I’ll try it.”

“ You wouldn’t like to stop here till morning? It is rather lonely,” suggested Rex, absolutely making a jest of his late terrors.

Will Staples laughed. “ You’re a bold boy !” said he. “ We’ll come at daybreak.”

“ Have you got the clothes as I directed ?”

“ Yes.”

“ Then good-night. I’ll put my fire out, in case somebody else might see it, who wouldn’t be as kind as you are.”

“ Good-night.”

“ Not a word for the Madam,” said Staples, when they reached the vessel.

“ Not a word, the ungrateful dog,” assented Blunt ; adding, with some heat, “ That’s the way with women. They’ll go through fire and water for a man that doesn’t care a snap

of his fingers for 'em ; but for any poor fellow who risks his neck to pleasure 'em they've nothing but sneers! I wish I'd never meddled in the business."

"There are no fools like old fools," thought Will Staples, looking back through the darkness at the place where the fire had been, but he did not utter his thoughts aloud.

At eight o'clock the next morning the *Pretty Mary* stood out to sea with every stitch of canvas set, alow and aloft. The skipper's fishing had come to an end. He had caught a shipwrecked seaman, who had been brought on board at daylight, and was then at breakfast in the cabin. The crew winked at each other when the haggard mariner, attired in garments that seemed remarkably well preserved, mounted the side. But they, none of them, were in a position to controvert the skipper's statement.

"Where are we bound for?" asked John Rex, smoking Staples' pipe in lingering puffs of delight. "I'm entirely in your hands, my worthy Blunt."

"My orders are to cruise about the whaling grounds until I meet my consort," returned Blunt, sullenly, "and put you aboard her.

She'll take you back to Sydney. I'm victualled for a twelvemonth's trip."

"Right!" cried Rex, clapping his preserver on the back. "I'm bound to get to Sydney somehow; but, as the Philistines are abroad, I may as well tarry in Jericho till my beard be grown. Don't stare at my scriptural quotation, Mr. Staples," he added, inspirited by creature-comforts, and secure amid his purchased friends. "I assure you that I've had the very best religious instruction. Indeed, it is chiefly owing to my worthy spiritual pastor and master that I am enabled to smoke this very villainous tobacco of yours at the present moment!"



CHAPTER XXVII.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

IT was not until they had scrambled up the beach to safety that the absconders became fully aware of the loss of another of their companions. As they stood on the break of the beach, wringing the water from their clothes, Gabbett's small eye, counting their number, missed the stroke oar.

"Where's Cox?"

"The fool fell overboard," said Jemmy Vetch, shortly. "He never had as much sense in that skull of his as would keep it sound on his shoulders."

Gabbett scowled. "That's three of us gone," he said, in the tones of a man suffering some personal injury.

They summed up their means of defence against attack. Sanders and Greenhill had knives. Gabbett still retained the axe in his belt. Vetch had dropped his musket at the Neck; and Bodenham and Cornelius were unarmed.

“Let’s have a look at the tucker,” said Vetch.

There was but one bag of provisions. It contained a piece of salt pork, two loaves, and some uncooked potatoes. Signal Hill station was not rich in edibles.

“That ain’t much,” said the Crow, with rueful face. “Is it, Gabbett?”

“It must do, any way,” returned the giant carelessly.

The inspection over, the six proceeded up the shore, and encamped under the lee of a rock. Bodenham was for lighting a fire, but Vetch, who by tacit consent had been chosen leader of the expedition, forbade it, saying that the light might betray them. “They’ll think we’re drowned, and won’t pursue us,” he said. So all that night the miserable wretches crouched fireless together.

Morning breaks clear and bright, and—free for the first time in ten years—they compre-

His Natural Life.

hend that their terrible journey has begun. "Where are we to go?—How are we to live?" asks Bodenham, scanning the barren bush that stretches to the barren sea. "Gabbett, you've been out before—how's it done?"

"We'll make the shepherds' huts, and live on their tucker till we get a change o' clothes," said Gabbett, evading the main question. "We can follow the coast line."

"Steady, lads," said prudent Vetch; "we must sneak round yon sandhills, and so creep into the scrub. If they've a good glass at the Neck, they can see us."

"It does seem close," said Bodenham; "I could pitch a stone on to the guard-house. Good-bye, you Bloody Spot!" he adds, with sudden rage, shaking his fist vindictively at the Penitentiary; "I don't want to see you no more till the Day o' Judgment."

Vetch divides the provisions, and they travel all that day until dark night. The scrub is prickly and dense. Their clothes are torn, their hands and feet bleeding. Already they feel out-wearied. No one pursuing, they light a fire, and sleep. The second day they come to a sandy spit that runs out into the sea, and find that they have got too far to the eastward, and must follow the shore line

to East Bay Neck. Back through the scrub they drag their heavy feet. That night they eat the last crumb of the loaf. The third day at high noon—after some toilsome walking they reach a big hill, now called Collins' Mount, and see the upper link of the earring, the isthmus of East Bay Neck at their feet. A few rocks are on their right hand, and blue in the lovely distance lies hated Maria Island. "We must keep well to the eastward," said Greenhill, "or we shall fall in with the settlers and get taken." So, passing the isthmus, they strike into the bush along the shore, and tightening their belts over their gnawing bellies, camp under some low-lying hills.

The fourth day is notable for the indisposition of Bodenham, who is a bad walker, and falling behind, delays the party by frequent cooeys. Gabbett threatens him with a worse fate than sore feet if he lingers. Luckily, that evening Greenhill espies a hut, but not trusting to the friendship of the occupant, they wait until he quits it in the morning, and then send Vetch to forage. Vetch, secretly congratulating himself on having by his counsel prevented violence, returns bending under half a bag of flour. "You'd better carry the

flour," said he to Gabbett, "and give me the axe." Gabbett eyes him for a while, as if struck by his puny form, but finally gives the axe to his mate Sanders. That day they creep along cautiously between the sea and the hills, camping at a creek. Vetch, after much search, finds a handful of berries, and adds them to the main stock. Half of this handful is eaten at once, the other half reserved for "to-morrow." The next day they come to an arm of the sea, and as they struggle northward, Maria Island disappears, and with it all danger from telescopes. That evening they reach the camping ground by twos and threes; and each wonders — between the paroxysms of hunger—if his face is as haggard, and his eyes as bloodshot, as those of his neighbour.

On the seventh day, Bodenham says his feet are so bad he can't walk, and Greenhill, with a greedy look at the berries, bids him stay behind. Being in a very weak condition he takes his companion at his word, and drops off about noon the next day. Gabbett, discovering this defection, however, goes back, and in an hour or so appears, driving the wretched creature before him with blows, as a sheep is driven to the shambles. Greenhill

remonstrates at another mouth being thus forced upon the party, but the giant silences him with a hideous glance. Jemmy Vetch remembers that Greenhill accompanied Gabbett once before, and feels uncomfortable. He gives hint of his suspicions to Sanders, but Sanders only laughs. It is horribly evident that there is an understanding among the three.

The ninth sun of their freedom, rising upon sandy and barren hillocks, bristling thick with cruel scrub, sees the six famine-stricken wretches cursing their God, and yet afraid to die. All around is the fruitless, shadeless, shelterless bush. Above, the pitiless heaven. In the distance, the remorseless sea. Something terrible must happen. That grey wilderness, arched by grey heaven stooping to grey sea, is a fitting keeper of hideous secrets. Vetch suggests that Oyster Bay cannot be far to the eastward—the line of ocean is deceitfully close—and though such a proceeding will take them out of their course, they resolve to make for it. After hobbling five miles, they seem no nearer than before, and, nigh dead with fatigue and starvation, sink despairingly upon the ground. Vetch thinks Gabbett's eyes have a wolfish glare in them,

and instinctively draws off from him. Said Greenhill, in the course of a dismal conversation, "I am so weak that I could eat a piece of a man."

On the tenth day Bodenham refuses to stir, and the others, being scarce able to drag along their limbs, sit on the ground about him. Greenhill, eyeing the prostrate man, said, slowly, "I have seen the same done before, boys, and it tasted like pork."

Vetch, hearing his savage comrade give utterance to a thought all had secretly cherished, speaks out, crying, "It would be murder to do it, and then, perhaps we couldn't eat it."

"Oh," said Gabbett, with a grin, "I'll warrant you that, but you must all have a hand in it."

Gabbett, Sanders, and Greenhill then go aside, and presently Sanders, coming to the Crow, said, "He consented to act as flogger. He deserves it."

"So did Gabbett, for that matter," shudders Vetch.

"Ay, but Bodenham's feet are sore," said Sanders, "and 'tis a pity to leave him."

Having no fire, they made a little breakwind; and Vetch, half-dozing behind this at

about three in the morning, hears some one cry out "Christ!" and awakes, sweating ice.

No one but Gabbett and Greenhill would eat that night. That savage pair, however, make a fire, fling ghastly fragments on the embers, and eat the broil before it is right warm. In the morning the frightful carcase is divided.

That day's march takes place in silence, and at the midday halt Cornelius volunteers to carry the billy, affecting great restoration from the food. Vetch gives it him, and in half an hour afterwards Cornelius is missing. Gabbett and Greenhill pursue him in vain, and return with curses. "He'll die like a dog," said Greenhill, "alone in the bush." Jemmy Vetch, with his intellect acute as ever, thinks that Cornelius prefers such a death to the one in store for him, but says nothing.

The twelfth morning dawns wet and misty, but Vetch, seeing the provision running short, strives to be cheerful, telling stories of men who have escaped greater peril. Vetch feels with dismay that he is the weakest of the party, but has some sort of ludicro-horrible consolation in remembering that he is also the leanest. They come to a creek that afternoon, and look, until nightfall, in vain

for a crossing-place. The next day Gabbett and Vetch swim across, and Vetch directs Gabbett to cut a long sapling, which, being stretched across the water, is seized by Greenhill and the Moocher, who are dragged over.

"What would you do without me?" said the Crow, with a ghastly grin.

They cannot kindle a fire, for Greenhill, who carries the tinder, has allowed it to get wet. The giant swings his axe in savage anger at enforced cold, and Vetch takes an opportunity to remark privately to him, what a *big* man Greenhill is.

On the fourteenth day they can scarcely crawl, and their limbs pain them. Greenhill, who is the weakest, sees Gabbett and the Moocher go aside to consult, and crawling to the Crow, whimpers: "For God's sake, Jemmy, don't let 'em murder me!"

"I can't help you," says Vetch, looking about in terror. "Think of poor Tom Bodenham."

"But he was no murderer. If they kill me, I shall go to hell with Tom's blood on my soul."

He writhes on the ground in sickening terror, and Gabbett arriving, bids Vetch

bring wood for the fire. Vetch, going, sees Greenhill clinging to wolfish Gabbett's knees, and Sanders calls after him, "You will hear it presently, Jem."

The nervous Crow puts his hands to his ears, but is conscious, nevertheless, of a dull crash and a groan. When he comes back, Gabbett is putting on the dead man's shoes, which are better than his own.

"We'll stop here a day or so and rest," said he, "now we've got provisions."

Two more days pass, and the three, eyeing each other suspiciously, resume their march. The third day—the sixteenth of their awful journey—such portions of the carcase as they have with them prove unfit to eat. They look into each other's famine-sharpened faces, and wonder "who next?"

"We must all die together," said Sanders quickly, "before anything else must happen."

Vetch marks the terror concealed in the words, and when the dreaded giant is out of earshot, says, "For God's sake, let's go on alone, Alick. You see what sort of a cove that Gabbett is—he'd kill his father before he'd fast one day."

They made for the bush, but the giant

turned and strode towards them. Vetch skipped nimbly on one side, but Gabbett struck the Moocher on the forehead with the axe. "Help! Jem, help!" cried the victim, cut, but not fatally, and in the strength of his desperation tore the axe from the monster who bore it, and flung it to Vetch. "Keep it, Jemmy," he cried, "let's have no more murder done!"

They fare again through the horrible bush until nightfall, when Vetch, in a strange voice, called the giant to him.

"He must die."

"Either you or he," laughs Gabbett. "Give me the axe."

"No, no," said the Crow, his thin, malignant face distorted by a horrible resolution. "I'll keep the axe. Stand back! You shall hold him, and I'll do the job."

Sanders, seeing them approach, knew his end had come, and submitted, crying, "Give me half an hour to pray for myself." They consent, and the bewildered wretch knelt down and folded his hands like a child. His big, stupid face worked with emotion. His great cracked lips moved in desperate agony. He wagged his head from side to side, in pitiful confusion of his brutalized senses. "I can't think o' the words, Jem!"

“Pah,” snarled the cripple, swinging the axe, “we can’t starve here all night.”

Four days had passed, and the two survivors of this awful journey sat watching each other. The gaunt giant, his eyes gleaming with hate and hunger, sat sentinel over the dwarf. The dwarf, chuckling at his superior sagacity, clutched the fatal axe. For two days they had not spoken to each other. For two days each had promised himself that on the next his companion must *sleep*—and die. Vetch comprehended the devilish scheme of the monster who had entrapped five of his fellow-beings to aid him by their deaths to his own safety, and held aloof. Gabbett watched to snatch the weapon from his companion, and make the odds even for once and for ever. In the day-time they travelled on, seeking each a pretext to creep behind the other. In the night-time when they feigned slumber, each stealthily raising a head caught the wakeful glance of his companion. Vetch felt his strength deserting him, and his brain overpowered by fatigue. Surely the giant, muttering, gesticulating, and slavering at the mouth, was on the road to madness. Would the monster find opportunity to rush at him, and, braving the blood-stained axe, kill him

by main force? or would he sleep, and be himself a victim? Unhappy Vetch! It is the terrible privilege of insanity to be sleepless.

On the fifth day, Vetch, creeping behind a tree, takes off his belt, and makes a noose. He will hang himself. He gets one end of the belt over a bough, and then his cowardice bids him pause. Gabbett approaches; he tries to evade him, and steal away into the bush. In vain. The insatiable giant, ravenous with famine, and sustained by madness, is not to be shaken off. Vetch tries to run, but his legs bend under him. The axe that has tried to drink so much blood feels heavy as lead. He will fling it away. No—he dares not. Night falls again. He must rest, or go mad. His limbs are powerless. His eyelids are glued together. He sleeps as he stands. This horrible thing must be a dream. He is at Port Arthur, or will wake on his pallet in the penny lodging-house he slept at when a boy. Is that the Deputy come to wake him to the torment of living? It is not time—surely not time yet. He sleeps—and the giant, grinning with ferocious joy, approaches on clumsy tip-toe and seizes the coveted axe.

On the north-east coast of Van Diemen's Land is a place called St. Helen's Point, and a certain skipper, being in want of fresh water, landing there with a boat's crew, found on the banks of the creek a gaunt and blood-stained man, clad in tattered yellow, who carried on his back an axe and a bundle. When the sailors came within sight of him, he made signs to them to approach, and opening his bundle with much ceremony offered them some of its contents. Filled with horror at what the maniac displayed, they seized and bound him. At Hobart Town he was recognised as the only survivor of the nine desperadoes who had escaped from Colonel Arthur's "Natural Penitentiary."

END OF BOOK THE THIRD.



BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

EXTRACTED FROM THE DIARY OF THE REV.
JAMES NORTH.

Bathurst, February the 11th, 1846.

IN turning over the pages of my journal, to note the good fortune that has just happened to me, I am struck by the utter desolation of my life for the last seven years.

Can it be possible that I, James North, the college-hero, the poet, the prizeman, the heaven knows what else, have been content to live on at this dreary spot—an animal, eating and drinking, for to-morrow I die? Yet it has been so. My world, that world of which I once dreamt so much, has been—here. My fame—which was to reach the ends of

the earth—has penetrated to the neighbouring stations. I am considered a “good preacher” by my sheep-feeding friends. It is kind of them.

Yet, on the eve of leaving it, I confess that this solitary life has not been without its charms. I have had my books and my thoughts—though at times the latter were but grim companions. I have striven with my familiar sin, and have not always been worsted. Melancholy reflection. “Not always!” “*But yet*” is as a jailer to bring forth some monstrous malefactor. I vowed, however, that I would not cheat myself in this diary of mine, and I will not. No evasions, no glossings over of my own sins. This journal is my confessor, and I bare my heart to it.

It is curious the pleasure I feel in setting down here in black and white these agonies and secret cravings of which I dare not speak. It is for the same reason, I suppose, that murderers make confession to dogs and cats, that people with something “on their mind” are given to thinking aloud, that the queen of Midas must needs whisper to the sedges the secret of her husband’s infirmity. Outwardly I am a man of God, pious and grave and

softly spoken. Inwardly—what? The mean, cowardly, weak sinner that this book knows me. . . . Imp! I could tear you in pieces! . . . One of these days I will. In the mean time, I will keep you under lock and key, and you shall hug my secrets close. No, old friend, with whom I have communed so long, forgive me, forgive me. You are to me instead of wife or priest. I tell to your cold blue pages—how much was it I bought you for in Paramatta, rascal?—these stories, longings, remorsees, which I would fain tell to human ear could I find a human being as discreet as thou. It has been said that a man dare not *write* all his thoughts and deeds; the words would blister the paper. Yet your sheets are smooth enough, you fat rogue! Our neighbours of Rome know human nature. A man *must* confess. One reads of wretches who have carried secrets in their bosoms for years, and blurted them forth at last. I, shut up here without companionship, without sympathy, without letters, cannot lock up my soul, and feed on my own thoughts. They will out, and so I whisper them to thee.

What art thou, thou tremendous power
Who dost inhabit us without our leave,
And art, within ourselves, another self,
A master self that loves to domineer?

What? Conscience? That is a word to frighten children. The conscience of each man is of his own making. My friend the shark-toothed cannibal whom Staples brought in his whaler to Sydney would have found his conscience reproach him sorely did he refuse to partake of the feasts made sacred by the customs of his ancestors. A spark of divinity? The divinity that, according to received doctrine, sits apart, enthroned amid sweet music, and leaves poor humanity to earn its condemnation as it may? I'll have none of that—though I preach it. One must soothe the vulgar senses of the people. Priesthood has its “pious frauds.” The Master spoke in parables. Wit? The wit that sees how ill-balanced are our actions and our aspirations? The devilish wit born of our own brain, that sneers at us for our own failings? Perhaps madness? More likely, for there are few men who are not mad one hour of the waking twelve. If differing from the judgment of the majority of mankind in regard to familiar things be madness, I suppose *I* am mad—or too wise. The speculation draws near to hair-splitting. James North, recall your early recklessness, your ruin, and your redemption; bring your mind back to earth. Circum-

stances have made you what you are, and will shape your destiny for you without your interference. That's comfortably settled !

Now supposing—to take another canter on my night-mare—that man is the slave of circumstance (a doctrine which I am inclined to believe, though unwilling to confess), what circumstance can have brought about the sudden awakening of the powers that be to James North's fitness for duty ?

“Hobart Town, Jan. 12th.

“Dear North,—I have much pleasure in informing you that you can be appointed Protestant chaplain at Norfolk Island, if you like. It seems that they did not get on well with the last man, and when my advice was asked, I at once recommended you for the office. The pay is small, but you have a house and so on. It is certainly better than Bathurst, and indeed is considered rather a prize in the clerical lottery.

“There is to be an investigation into affairs down there. Poor old Pratt—who went down, as you know, at the earnest solicitation of the Government—seems to have become absurdly lenient with the prisoners, and it is reported that the island is in a frightful state. Sir Eardley is looking out for some disciplinarian to take the place in hand.

“In the mean time, the chaplaincy is vacant, and I thought of you.”

I must consider this seeming good fortune further.

February 19th.—I accept. There is work to be done among those unhappy men that may be my purgation. The authorities shall hear me yet—though inquiry was stifled at Port Arthur. By the way, a Pharaoh has arisen who knows not Joseph. It is evident that the meddlesome parson, who complained of men being flogged to death, is forgotten, as the men are! How many ghosts must haunt the dismal loneliness of that prison shore! Poor Burgess is gone the way of all flesh. I wonder if *his* spirit revisits the scenes of its violences? I have written “poor” Burgess.

It is strange how we pity a man gone out of this life. Enmity is extinguished when one can but *remember* injuries. If a man had injured me, the fact of his living at all would be sufficient grounds for me to hate him; if I had injured *him*, I should hate him still more. Is that the reason I hate myself at times—my greatest enemy, and one whom I have injured beyond forgiveness. There are offences against one's own nature that are not to be forgiven. Isn't it Tacitus who says “the hatred of those most nearly related is most inveterate?” But—I am taking flight again.

February 27th, 11.30 p.m.—Nine Creeks Station. I like to be accurate in names, dates, &c. Accuracy is a virtue. To exercise it, then. Station ninety miles from Bathurst. I should say about 4,000 head of cattle. Luxury without refinement. Plenty to eat, drink, and read. Hostess' name—Carr. She is a well-preserved creature, about thirty-four years of age, and a clever woman—not in a poetical sense, but in the widest worldly acceptation of the term. At the same time, I should be sorry to be her husband. Women have no business with a brain like hers—that is, if they wish to be women and not sexual monsters. Mrs. Carr is not a lady, though she might have been one. I don't think she is a good woman either. It is possible, indeed, that she has known the factory before now. There is a mystery about her, for I was informed that she was a Mrs. Purfoy, the widow of a whaling captain, and had married one of her assigned servants, who had deserted her five years ago, so soon as he obtained his freedom. A word or two at dinner set me thinking. She had received some English papers, and, accounting for her pre-occupied manner, grimly said, "I think I have news of

my husband." I should not like to be in Carr's shoes if she *has* news of him ! I don't think she would suffer indignity calmly. After all, what business is it of mine ? I was beguiled into taking more wine at dinner than I needed. Confessor, do you hear me ? But I will not allow myself to be carried away. You grin, you fat familiar ! So may I, but I shall be eaten with remorse to-morrow.

March 3rd. — A place called Jerrilang, where I have a head and heartache. "One that hath let go himself from the hold and stay of reason, and lies open to the mercy of all temptations."

March 20th.—Sydney. At Captain Frere's. —Seventeen days since I have opened you, beloved and detested companion of mine. I have more than half a mind to never open you again ! To read you is to recall to myself all I would most willingly forget ; yet not to read you would be to forget all that which I should for my sins remember.

The last week has made a new man of me. I am no longer morose, despairing, and bitter, but genial and on good terms with fortune.

It is strange that accident should have induced me to stay a week under the same roof with that vision of brightness which has haunted me so long. A meeting in the street, an introduction, an invitation—the thing is done.

The circumstances which form our fortunes are certainly curious things. I had thought never again to meet the bright young face to which I felt so strange an attraction—and lo! here it is smiling on me daily. Captain Frere should be a happy man. Yet there is a skeleton in this house also. That young wife, by nature so lovable and so mirthful, ought not to have the sadness on her face that twice to-day has clouded it. He seems a passionate and boorish creature, this wonderful convict disciplinarian. His convicts—poor devils—are doubtless disciplined enough. Charming little Sylvia, with your quaint wit and weird beauty, he is not good enough for you—and yet it was a love match.

March 21st.—I have read family prayers every night since I have been here—my black coat and white tie gave me the natural pre-eminence in such matters—and I feel guilty every time I read. I wonder what the little lady of the devotional eyes would say if she

knew that I am a miserable hypocrite, preaching that which I do not practise, exhorting others to believe those marvels which I do not believe? I am a coward not to throw off the saintly mask, and appear as a Freethinker. Yet, am I a coward? I urge upon myself that it is for the glory of God I hold my peace. The scandal of a priest turned infidel would do more harm than the reign of reason would do good. Imagine this trustful woman for instance—she would suffer anguish at the thoughts of such a sin, though another were the sinner. “If any one offend one of these little ones it were better for him that a millstone be hanged about his neck and that he be cast into the sea.” Yet truth is truth, and should be spoken—should it not, malignant monitor, who remindest me how often I fail to speak it? Surely among all his army of black-coats our worthy bishop must have some men like me, who cannot bring their reason to believe in things contrary to the experience of mankind and the laws of nature and physics.

March 22nd.—This unromantic Captain Frere has had some romantic incidents in his life, and he is fond of dilating upon them. It seems that in early life he expected to have

been left a large fortune by an uncle who had quarrelled with his heir. But the uncle dies on the day fixed for the altering of the will, the son disappears, and is thought to be drowned. The widow, however, steadfastly refuses to believe in any report of the young man's death, and having a life interest in the property, holds it against all comers. My poor host in consequence comes out here on his pay, and, three years ago, just as he is hoping that the death of his aunt may give him opportunity to enforce a claim as next of kin to some portion of the property, the long-lost son returns, is recognized by his mother and the trustees, and installed in due heirship! The other romantic story is connected with Frere's marriage. He told me after dinner to-night, how his wife had been wrecked when a child, and how he had saved her life, and defended her from the rude hands of an escaped convict—one of the monsters that our monstrous system breeds. "That was how we fell in love," said he, tossing off his wine complacently.

"An auspicious opportunity," said I. To which he nodded. He is not overburdened with brains, I fancy.

Let me see if I can set down some account of this lovely place and its people.

A long low white house, surrounded by a blooming garden. Wide windows opening on a lawn. The ever glorious, ever changing sea beneath. It is evening. I am talking with Mrs. Frere, of theories of social reform, of picture galleries, of sunsets, and new books. There comes a sound of wheels on the gravel. It is the magistrate returned from his convict-discipline. We hear him come briskly up the steps, but we go on talking. (I fancy there was a time when the lady would have run to meet him.) He enters, coldly kisses his wife, and disturbs at once the current of our thoughts. "It has been hot to-day. What, still no letter from Head-quarters, Mr. North! I saw Mrs. Golightly in town, Sylvia, and she asked for you. There is to be a ball at Government House. We must go." Then he departs, and is heard in the distance indistinctly cursing because the water is not hot enough, or because Dawkins his convict servant, has not brushed his trousers sufficiently. We resume our chat, but he returns all hungry, and bluff, and whisker-brushed. "Dinner. Ha-ha! I'm ready for it. North, take Mrs. Frere." By-and-by it is, "North, some sherry? Sylvia, the soup is spoilt again. Did you go out to-day? No?" His eyebrows contract here,

and I know he says inwardly, "Reading some trashy novel, I suppose." However he grins, and obligingly relates how the police have captured Cockatoo Bill, the noted bushranger.

After dinner the disciplinarian and I converse—of dogs and horses, gamecocks, convicts, and moving accidents by flood and field. I remember old college feats, and strive to keep pace with him in the relation of athletics. What hypocrites we are!—for all the time I am longing to get to the drawing-room, and finish my criticism of the new poet, Mr. Tennyson, to Mrs. Frere. Frere does not read Tennyson—nor anybody else. Adjourned to the drawing-room, we chat—Mrs. Frere and I—until supper. (He eats supper.) She is a charming companion, and when I talk my best—I *can* talk, you must admit, O Familiar—her face lightens up with an interest I rarely see upon it at other times. I feel cooled and soothed by this companionship. The quiet refinement of this house, after bullocks and Bathurst, is like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

Mrs. Frere is about five-and-twenty. She is rather beneath the middle height, with a slight, girlish figure. This girlish appearance is enhanced by the fact that she has bright fair

hair and blue eyes. Upon conversation with her, however, one sees that her face has lost much of the delicate plumpness which it probably owned in youth. She has had one child, born only to die. Her cheeks are thin, and her eyes have a tinge of sadness, which speak of physical pain or mental grief. This thinness of face makes the eyes appear larger and the brow broader than they really are. Her hands are white and painfully thin. They must have been plump and pretty once. Her lips are red with perpetual fever.

Captain Frere seems to have absorbed all his wife's vitality. (Who quotes the story of Lucius Claudius Hermippus, who lived to a great age by being constantly breathed on by young girls? I suppose Burton—who quotes everything.) In proportion as she has lost her vigour and youth, he has gained strength and heartiness. Though he is at least forty years of age, he does not look more than thirty. His face is ruddy, his eyes bright, his voice firm and ringing. He must be a man of considerable strength and—I should say—of more than ordinary animal courage and animal appetite. There is not a nerve in his body which does not twang like a piano wire. In appearance, he is tall, broad, and bluff, with

red whiskers and reddish hair slightly touched with grey. His manner is loud, coarse, and imperious; his talk of dogs, horses, cocks, and convicts. What a strangely-mated pair!

March 30th.—A letter from Van Diemen's Land. "There is a row in the pantry," said Frere, with his accustomed slang. It seems that the Comptroller-General of Convicts has appointed a Mr. Pounce to go down and make a report on the state of Norfolk Island. I am to go down with him, and shall receive instructions to that effect from the Comptroller-General. I have informed Frere of this, and he has written to Pounce to come and stay on his way down. There has been nothing but convict discipline talked since. Frere is great upon this point, and wearies me with his explanations of convict tricks and wickedness. He is celebrated for his knowledge of such matters. Detestable wisdom! His servants hate him, but they obey him without a murmur. I have observed that habitual criminals—like all savage beasts—cower before the man who has once mastered them. I should not be surprised if the Van Diemen's Land Government selected Frere as their "disciplinarian." I hope they won't, and yet *I hope they will.*

April 4th.—Nothing worth recording until to-day. Eating, drinking, and sleeping. Despite my forty-seven years, I begin to feel almost like the James North who fought the bargee and took the gold medal. What a drink water is! The *fons Bandusiæ splendor vitreo* was better than all the Massic, Master Horace! I doubt if your celebrated liquor, bottled when Manlius was consul, could compare with it.

But to my notable facts. I have found out to-night two things which surprise me. One is that the convict who attempted the life of Mrs. Frere is none other than the unhappy man whom my fatal weakness caused to be flogged at Port Arthur, and whose face comes before me to reproach me even now. The other that Mrs. Carr is an old acquaintance of Frere's. The latter piece of information I obtained in a curious way. One night, after Mrs. Frere had retired, we were talking of clever women. I broached my theory, that strong intellect in women went far to destroy their womanly nature.

“Desire in man,” said I, “should be Volition in women: Reason, Intuition; Reverence, Devotion; Passion, Love. The woman should strike a lower key-note, but a sharper

sound. Man has vigour of reason, woman quickness of feeling. The woman who possesses masculine force of intellect is abnormal."

He did not half comprehend me, I could see, but he agreed with the broad view of the case. "I only knew one woman who was really 'strong-minded,' as they call it," he said, "and she was a regular bad one."

"It does not follow that she should be *bad*," said I.

"This one was, though—stock, lock, and barrel. But as sharp as a needle, sir, and as immovable as a rock. A fine woman, too."

I saw by the expression of the man's face that he owned ugly memories, and pressed him further. "She's up country somewhere," he said. "Married her assigned servant, I was told, a fellow named Carr. I haven't seen her for years, and don't know what she may be like now, but in the days when I knew her she was just what you describe." (Let it be noted that I had described nothing.) "She came out in the ship with me as maid to my wife's mother."

It was on the tip of my tongue to say that I had met her, but I don't know what induced me to be silent. There are passages in the lives of men of Captain Frere's complexion

which don't bear descanting on. I expect there has been in this case, for he changed the subject abruptly, as his wife came in. Is it possible that these two creatures—the notable disciplinarian and the wife of the assigned servant—could have been more than friends in youth? Quite possible. He is the sort of man for gross amours. (A pretty way I am abusing my host!) And the supple woman with the dark eyes would have been just the creature to enthrall him. Perhaps some such story as this may account in part for Mrs. Frere's sad looks. Why do I speculate on such things? I seem to do violence to myself and to insult *her* by writing such suspicions. If I was a Flagellant now, I would don hair-shirt and up flail. "For this sort cometh not out but by prayer and fasting."

April 7th.—Mr. Pounce has arrived—full of the importance of his mission. He walks with the air of a minister of state on the eve of a vacant garter, hoping, wondering, fearing, and dignified even in his dubitancy. I am as flippant as a school-girl concerning this fatuous official, and yet—Heaven knows—I feel deeply enough the importance of the task

he has before him. One relieves one's brain by these whirlings of one's mental limbs. I remember that a prisoner at Hobart Town, twice condemned and twice reprieved, jumped and shouted with frenzied vehemence when he heard his sentence of death finally pronounced. He told me if he had not so shouted, he believed he would have gone mad.

April 10th.—We had a state dinner last night. The conversation was about nothing in the world but convicts. I never saw Mrs. Frere to less advantage. Silent, *distracte*, and sad. She told me after dinner that she disliked the very name of "convict" from early associations. "I have lived among them all my life," she said, "but that does not make it the better for me. I have terrible fancies at times, Mr. North, that seem half-memories. I dread to be brought in contact with prisoners again. I am sure that some evil awaits me at their hands."

I laughed, of course, but it would not do. She holds to her own opinion, and looks at me with horror in her eyes. This terror in her face is perplexing.

"You are nervous," I said. "You want *rest*."

“ I *am* nervous,” she replied, with that candour of voice and manner I have before remarked in her, “ and I have presentiments of evil.”

We sat silent for a while, and then she suddenly turned her large eyes on me, and said calmly, “ Mr. North, what death shall I die ?” The question was an echo of my own thoughts—I have some foolish (?) fancies as to physiognomy—and it made me start. What death, indeed ? What sort of death would one meet with widely-opened eyes, parted lips, and brows bent as though to rally fast-flying courage ? Not a peaceful death surely. I brought my black coat to my aid. “ My dear lady, you must not think of such things. Death is but a sleep, you know. Why anticipate a nightmare ?”

She sighed, slowly awaking as though from some momentary trance. Checking herself on the verge of tears, she rallied, turned the conversation, and finding an excuse for going to the piano, dashed into a waltz. This unnatural gaiety ended, I fancy, in an hysterical fit. I heard her husband afterwards recommending sal volatile. He is the sort of man who would recommend sal volatile to the Pythoness if she consulted him.

April 26th.—All has been arranged, and we start to-morrow. Mr. Pounce is in a condition of painful dignity. He seems afraid to move lest motion should thaw his official ice. Having found out that I am the “chaplain,” he has refrained from familiarity. My self-love is wounded, but my patience relieved. *Query*: Would not the majority of mankind rather be bored by people in authority than not noticed by them? James North declines to answer for his part.

I have made my farewells to my friends, and on looking back on the pleasant hours I have spent, felt saddened. It is not likely that I shall have many such pleasant hours. I feel like a vagabond who, having been allowed to sit by a cheerful fireside for a while, is turned out into the wet and windy streets, and finds them colder than ever. What were the lines I wrote in her album?

“As some poor tavern-haunter drenched in wine
With staggering footsteps through the streets returning,
—Seeing through blinding rain a beacon shine
From household lamp in happy window burning,—

“Pauses an instant at the reddened pane
To gaze on that sweet scene of love and duty,
Then turns into the wild wet night again,
Lest his sad presence mar its homely beauty.”

Yes, those were the lines. With more of truth in them than she expected; and yet what business have I sentimentalizing? My socius think "what a puling fool this North is!"

So, that's over! Now for Norfolk Island and my purgation.



CHAPTER II.

THE LOST HEIR.

THE lost son of Sir Richard Devine had returned to England, and made claim to his name and fortune. In other words, John Rex had successfully carried out the scheme by which he had usurped the rights of his old convict-comrade.

Smoking his cigar in his bachelor lodgings, or pausing in a calculation concerning a race, John Rex often wondered at the strange ease with which he had carried out so monstrous and seemingly difficult an imposture. After he was landed in Sydney by the vessel which Sarah Purfoy had sent to save him, he found

himself a slave to a bondage scarcely less galling than that from which he had escaped—the bondage of enforced companionship with an unloved woman. The opportune death of one of her assigned servants enabled Sarah Purfoy to instal the escaped convict in his room. In the strange state of society which prevailed of necessity in New South Wales at that period, it was not unusual for assigned servants to marry among the free settlers, and when it was heard that Mrs. Purfoy, the widow of a whaling captain, had married John Carr, her storekeeper, transported for embezzlement, and with two years of his sentence yet to run, no one expressed surprise. Indeed, when, the year after, John Carr blossomed as an “expiree,” master of a fine wife and a fine fortune, there were many about him who would have made his existence in Australia pleasant enough. But John Rex had no notion of remaining longer than he could help, and ceaselessly sought means of escape from this second prison-house. For a long time his search was unsuccessful. Much as she loved the scoundrel, Sarah Purfoy did not scruple to tell him that she had bought him, and regarded him as her property. He knew that if he made any

attempt to escape from his marriage-bonds, the woman who had risked so much to save him would not hesitate to deliver him over to the authorities, and state how the opportune death of John Carr had enabled her to give name and employment to John Rex, the absconder. He had thought once that the fact of her being his wife would prevent her from giving evidence against him, and that he could thus defy her. But she reminded him that a word to Blunt would be all sufficient.

“I know you don’t care for me now, John,” she said, with grim complacency; “but your life is in my hands, and if you desert me I will bring you to the gallows.”

In vain, in his secret eagerness to be rid of her, he raged and chafed. He was tied hand and foot. She held his money, and her shrewd wit had more than doubled it. She was all-powerful, and he could but wait until her death or some lucky accident should rid him of her, and leave him free to follow out the scheme he had matured. “Once rid of her,” he thought, in his solitary rides over the station of which he was the nominal owner, “the rest is easy. I shall return to England with a plausible story of shipwreck, and shall

doubtless be received with open arms by the dear mother from whom I have been so long parted. Richard Devine shall have his own again."

To be rid of her was not so easy. Twice he tried to escape from his thralldom, and was twice brought back. "I have bought you, John," his partner had laughed, "and you don't get away from me. Surely you can be content with these comforts. You were content with less once. I am not so ugly and repulsive, am I?"

"I am home-sick," John Carr retorted. "Let us go to England, Sarah."

She tapped her strong white fingers sharply on the table. "Go to England? No, no. That is what you would like to do. You would be master there. You would take my money, and leave me to starve. I know you, Jack. We stop here, dear. Here, where I can hand you over to the first trooper as an escaped convict if you are not kind to me."

"She-devil!"

"Oh, I don't mind your abuse. Abuse me if you like, Jack. Beat me if you will, but don't leave me, or it will be worse for you."

"You are a strange woman!" he cried, in sudden petulant admiration.

“To love such a villain? I don’t know that. I love you because you are a villain. A better man would be wearisome to such as I am.”

“I wish to Heaven I’d never left Port Arthur. Better there than this dog’s life.”

“Go back, then. You have only to say the word!”

And so they would wrangle, she glorying in her power over the man who had so long triumphed over her, and he consoling himself with the hope that the day was not far distant which should bring him at once freedom and fortune. One day the chance came to him. His wife was ill, and the ungrateful scoundrel stole five hundred pounds, and taking two horses reached Sydney, and obtained passage in a vessel bound for Rio.

Having escaped from thralldom, John Rex proceeded to play for the great stake of his life with the utmost caution. He went to the Continent, and lived for weeks together in the towns where Richard Devine might possibly have resided, familiarizing himself with streets, making the acquaintance of old inhabitants, drawing into his own hands all loose ends of information which could help to knit the meshes of his net the closer. Such loose ends

were not numerous ; the prodigal had been too poor, too insignificant, to leave strong memories behind him. Yet Rex knew well by what strange accidents the deceit of an assumed identity is often penetrated. Some old comrade or companion of the lost heir might suddenly appear with keen questions as to trifles which would cut his flimsy web to shreds, as easily as the sword of Saladin divided the floating silk. He could not afford to ignore the most insignificant circumstances. With consummate skill, piece by piece he built up the story which was to deceive the poor mother, and to make him possessor of one of the largest private fortunes in England.

This was the tale he hit upon. He had been saved from the burning *Hydaspes* by a vessel bound for Rio. Ignorant of the death of Sir Richard, and prompted by the pride which was known to be a leading feature of his character, he had determined not to return, until fortune should have bestowed upon him wealth at least equal to the inheritance from which he had been ousted. In Spanish America he had striven to accumulate that wealth in vain. As *vaquero*, traveller, speculator, sailor, he had toiled for fourteen years, and had failed. Worn out and penitent, he

had returned home to find a corner of English earth in which to lay his weary bones. The tale was plausible enough, and in the telling of it he was armed at all points. There was little fear that the navigator of the captured *Osprey*, the man who had lived in Chili and "cut out" cattle on the Carrum Plains, would prove lacking in knowledge of riding, seamanship, or Spanish customs. Moreover, he had determined upon a course of action which showed his knowledge of human nature.

The will under which Richard Devine inherited was dated in 1807, and had been made when the testator was in the first hopeful glow of paternity. By its terms Lady Devine was to receive a life interest of three thousand a year in her husband's property—which was placed in the hands of two trustees,—until her eldest son died or attained the age of twenty-five years. When either of these events should occur, the property was to be realized, Lady Devine receiving a sum of a hundred thousand pounds, which, invested in Consols for her benefit, would, according to Sir Richard's prudent calculation, exactly compensate for her loss of interest, the remainder going absolutely to the son, if living, to his children or next of kin if

dead. The trustees appointed were Lady Devine's father, Colonel Wotton Wade, and Mr. Silas Quaid, of the firm of Purkiss and Quaid, Thavies Inn, Sir Richard's solicitors. Colonel Wade, before his death, had appointed, with Quaid's consent, his own son, Mr. Francis Wade, to act in his stead. When Mr. Quaid died, the firm of Purkiss and Quaid (represented in the Quaid branch of it by a smart London-bred nephew) declined further responsibility; and, with the consent of Lady Devine, Francis Wade continued alone in his trust. Sir Richard's sister and her husband, Anthony Frere, of Bristol, were long ago dead, and, as we know, their representative, Maurice Frere, content at last in the lot that fortune had sent him, had given up all thought of meddling with his uncle's business. John Rex, therefore, in the person of the returned Richard, had but two persons to satisfy, his putative uncle, Mr. Francis Wade, and his putative mother, Lady Devine.

This he found to be the easiest task possible. Francis Wade was an invalid virtuoso, who detested business, and whose ambition was to be known as a man of taste. The possessor of a small independent income, he had resided at North End ever since his

father's death, and had made the place a miniature Strawberry Hill. When, at his sister's urgent wish, he assumed the sole responsibility of the estate, he put all the floating capital into three per cents., and was content to see the interest accumulate. Lady Devine had never recovered the shock of the circumstances attending Sir Richard's death, and, clinging to the belief in her son's existence, regarded herself as the mere guardian of his interests, to be displaced at any moment by his sudden return. The retired pair lived thus together, and spent in charity and *bric-a-brac* about a fourth of their mutual income. By both of them the return of the wanderer was hailed with delight. To Lady Devine it meant the realization of a lifelong hope, become part of her nature. To Francis Wade it meant relief from a responsibility which his simplicity always secretly loathed, the responsibility of looking after another person's money.

"I shall not think of interfering with the arrangements which you have made, my dear uncle," said Mr. John Rex, on the first night of his reception. "It would be most ungrateful of me to do so. My wants are very few, and can easily be supplied. I will see *your lawyers* some day, and settle it."

“ See them at once, Richard, see them at once. I am no man of business, you know, but I think you will find all right.”

Richard, however, put off the visit from day to day. He desired to have as little to do with lawyers as possible. He had resolved upon his course of action. He would get money from his mother for immediate needs, and when that mother died, he would assert his rights. “ My rough life has unfitted me for drawing-rooms, dear mother,” he said. “ Do not let there be a display about my return. Give me a corner to smoke my pipe, and I am happy.” Lady Devine, with a loving tender pity, for which John Rex could not altogether account, consented, and “ Mr. Richard ” soon came to be regarded as a martyr to circumstances, a man conscious of his own imperfections, and one whose imperfections were therefore to be lightly dwelt upon. So the returned prodigal had his own suite of rooms, his own servants, his own bank account, drank, smoked, and was merry.

For five or six months he thought himself in Paradise. Then he began to find his life insufferably weary. The burden of hypocrisy is very heavy to bear, and Rex was compelled perpetually to bear it. His mother demanded

all his time. She hung upon his lips ; she made him repeat fifty times the story of his wanderings. She was never tired of kissing him, of weeping over him, of thanking him for the " sacrifice " he had made for her.

" We promised never to speak of it more, Richard," the poor lady said one day, " but if my lifelong love can make atonement for the wrong I have done you——"

" Hush, dearest mother," said John. Rex, who did not in the least comprehend what it was all about. " Let us say no more."

Lady Devine wept quietly for a while, and then went away, leaving the man who pretended to be her son much bewildered and a little frightened. There was a secret which he had not fathomed between Lady Devine and her son. The mother did not again refer to it, and gaining courage as the days went on, Rex grew bold enough to forget his fears.

In the first stages of his deception, he had been timid and cautious. Then the soothing influence of comfort, respect, and security came upon him, and almost refined him. He began to feel as he had felt when Mr. Lionel Crofton was alive. The sensation of being ministered to by a loving woman, who kissed him night and morning, calling him " son,"—

of being regarded with admiration by rustics, with envy by respectable folk—of being deferred to in all things—was novel and pleasing. They were so good to him that he felt at times inclined to confess all, and leave his case in the hands of the folk he had injured. Yet—he thought—such a course would be absurd. It would result in no benefit to any one, simply in misery to himself. The true Richard Devine was buried fathoms deep in the greedy ocean of convict-discipline, and the waves of innumerable punishments washed over him. John Rex flattered himself that he had usurped the name of one who was in fact no living man, and that, unless one should rise from the dead, Richard Devine could never return to accuse him. So flattering himself, he gradually became bolder, and by slow degrees suffered his true nature to appear. He was violent to the servants, cruel to dogs and horses, often wantonly coarse in speech, and brutally regardless of the feelings of others. Governed, like most women, solely by her feelings, Lady Devine had at first been prodigal of her affection to the man she believed to be her injured son. But his rash acts of selfishness, his habits of grossness and self-

indulgence gradually disgusted her. For some time she—poor woman—fought against this feeling, endeavouring to overcome her instincts of distaste, and arguing with herself that to permit a detestation of her unfortunate son to arise in her heart was almost criminal ; but she was at length forced to succumb.

For the first year Mr. Richard conducted himself with great propriety, but as his circle of acquaintance and his confidence in himself increased, he now and then forgot the part he was playing. One day Mr. Richard went to pass the day with a sporting friend, only too proud to see at his table so wealthy and wonderful a man. Mr. Richard drank a good deal more than was good for him, and came home in a condition of disgusting drunkenness. I say disgusting, because some folk have the art of getting drunk after a humorous fashion, that robs intoxication of half its grossness. For John Rex to be drunk was to be himself—coarse and cruel. Francis Wade was away, and Lady Devine had retired for the night, when the dog-cart brought home “Mr. Richard.” The virtuous butler-porter, who opened the door, received a blow in the chest and a demand for “Brandy!” The

groom was cursed, and ordered to instant oblivion. Mr. Richard stumbled into the dining-room—veiled in dim light as a dining-room which was “sitting up” for its master ought to be—and ordered “more candles!” The candles were brought, after some delay, and Mr. Richard amused himself by spilling their meltings upon the carpet. “Let’s have ’luminashon!” he cried; and climbing with muddy boots upon the costly chairs, scraping with his feet the polished table, attempted to fix the wax in the silver sconces, with which the antiquarian tastes of Mr. Francis Wade had adorned the room.

“You’ll break the table, sir,” said the servant.

“Damn the table!” said Rex. “Buy ’nother table. What’s table t’you?”

“Oh, certainly, sir,” replied the man.

“Oh, c’ert’nly! Why c’ert’nly? What do you know about it?”

“Oh, certainly not, sir,” replied the man.

“If I had—stockwhip here—I make you—hic—skip! Whar’s brandy?”

“Here, Mr. Richard.”

“Have some! Good brandy! Send for servantsh and have dance. D’you dance, Tomkins?”

“No, Mr. Richard.”

“Then you shall dance now, Tomkins. You’ll dance upon nothing one day, Tomkins! Here! Halloo! Mary! Susan! Janet! William! Hey! Halloo!” And he began to shout and blaspheme.

“Don’t you think it’s time for bed, Mr. Richard?” one of the men ventured to suggest.

“No!” roared the ex-convict, emphatically, “I *don’t*! I’ve gone to bed at daylight far too long. We’ll have luminashon! I’m master here. Master everything. Richard ‘Vine’s my name. Isn’t it, Tomkins, you villain?”

“Oh-h-h! Ye-yes, Mr. Richard.”

“Course it is, and make you know it, too! I’m no painter-picture, crockery chap. I’m genelman! Genelman seen the world! Knows what what. There ain’t much I ain’t fly to. Wait till the old woman’s dead, Tomkins, and you shall see!” More swearing, and awful threats of what the inebriate would do when he was in possession. “Bring up some brandy!” Crash goes the bottle in the fireplace. “Light up the droring-rooms; we’ll have dance! I’m drunk! what’s that? If you’d gone through what I have, you’d be glad to be drunk. I look a fool”—this to his image

in another glass. "I ain't though, or I wouldn't be here. Curse you, you grinning idiot"—crash goes his fist through the mirror—"don't grin at me. Play up there! Where's old woman! Fetch her out and let's dance!"

"Lady Devine has gone to bed, Mr. Richard," cried Tomkins, aghast, attempting to bar the passage to the upper regions.

"Then let's have her out o' bed," cried John Rex, plunging to the door.

Tomkins, attempting to restrain him, is instantly hurled into a cabinet of rare china, and the drunken brute essays the stairs. The other servants seize him. He curses and fights like a demon. Doors bang open, lights gleam, maids hover, horrified, asking if it's "fire?" and begging to be "put out." The whole house is in an uproar; in the midst of which Lady Devine appears, and looks down upon the scene. Rex catches sight of her, and bursts into blasphemy. She withdraws, strangely terrified; and the animal, torn, bloody, and blasphemous, is at last got into his own apartments, the groom, whose face had been seriously damaged in the encounter, bestowing a hearty kick on the prostrate carcase at parting.

The next morning Lady Devine declined to see her son, though he sent a special apology to her.

"I am afraid I was a little overcome by wine last night," said he to Tomkins.

"Well, you was, sir," said Tomkins.

"A very little wine makes me quite ill, Tomkins. Did I do anything very violent?"

"You *was* rather obstropolous, Mr. Richard."

"Here's a sovereign for you, Tomkins. Did I *say* anything?"

"You cussed a good deal, Mr. Richard. Most gents do when they've bin—hum—dining out, Mr. Richard."

"What a fool I am," thought John Rex, as he dressed. "I shall spoil everything if I don't take care." He was right. He was going the right way to spoil everything. However, for this bout he made amends—money soothed the servants' hall, and apologies and time won Lady Devine's forgiveness.

"I cannot yet conform to English habits, my dear mother," said Rex, "and feel at times out of place in your quiet home. I think that—if you can spare me a little money—I should like to travel."

Lady Devine—with a sense of relief for which she blamed herself—assented, and

supplied with letters of credit, John Rex went to Paris.

Fairly started in the world of dissipation and excess, he began to grow reckless. When a young man, he had been singularly free from the vice of drunkenness ; turning his sobriety—as he did all his virtues—to vicious account, but he had learnt to drink deep in the loneliness of the bush. Master of a large sum of money, he had intended to spend it as he would have spent it in his younger days. He had forgotten that since his death and burial the world had not grown younger. It was possible that Mr. Lionel Crofton might have discovered some of the old set of fools and knaves with whom he had once mixed. Many of them were alive and flourishing. Mr. Lemoine, for instance, was respectably married in his native island of Jersey, and had already threatened to disinherit a nephew who showed a tendency to dissipation.

But Mr. Lemoine would not care to recognize Mr. Lionel Crofton, the gambler and rake, in his proper person, and it was not expedient that his acquaintance should be made in the person of Richard Devine, lest by some unlucky chance he should recognize the cheat.

Thus poor Lionel Crofton was compelled to lie still in his grave, and Mr. Richard Devine, trusting to a big beard and more burly figure, to keep his secret, was compelled to begin his friendship with Mr. Lionel's whilom friends all over again. In Paris and London there were plenty of people ready to become hail-fellow-well-met with any gentleman possessing money. Mr. Richard Devine's history was whispered in many a boudoir and club-room. The history, however, was not always told in the same way. It was generally known that Lady Devine had a son who, being supposed to be dead, had suddenly returned, to the confusion of his family. But the manner of his return was told in many ways.

In the first place, Mr. Francis Wade, well-known though he was, did not move in that brilliant circle which had lately received his nephew. There are in England many men of fortune as large as that left by the old ship-builder, who are positively unknown in that little world which is supposed to contain all the men worth knowing. Francis Wade was a man of mark in his own coterie. Among artists, *bric-a-brac* sellers, antiquarians and men of letters, he was known as a patron and a man of taste. His bankers and his lawyers.

knew him to be of independent fortune, but as he neither mixed in politics, "went into society," betted, or speculated in merchandise, there were several large sections of the community who had never heard his name. Many respectable money-lenders would have required "further information" before they would discount his bills; and "club-men" in general—save, perhaps, those ancient quidnuncs who know everybody, from Adam downwards—had but little acquaintance with him. The advent of Mr. Richard Devine—a coarse person of unlimited means—had therefore chief influence upon that sinister circle of male and female rogues who form the "half-world." They began to inquire concerning his antecedents, and, failing satisfactory information, to invent lies concerning him. It was generally believed that he was a black sheep, a man whose family kept him out of the way, but who was, in a pecuniary sense, "good" for a considerable sum.

Thus taken upon trust, Mr. Richard Devine mixed in the very best of bad society, and had no lack of agreeable friends to help him to spend his money. So admirably did he spend it, that Francis Wade became at last alarmed at the frequent drafts, and urged his nephew

to bring his affairs to a final settlement. Richard Devine—in Paris, or Homburg, or London, or elsewhere—could never be got to attack business, and Mr. Francis Wade grew more and more anxious. The poor gentleman positively became ill through the anxiety consequent upon his nephew's dissipations. "I wish, my dear Richard, that you would let me know what to do," he wrote. "I wish, my dear uncle, that you would do what you think best," was his nephew's reply.

"Will you let Purkiss and Quaid look into the business?" said the badgered Francis.

"I hate lawyers," said Richard. "Do what you think right."

Mr. Wade began to repent of his too easy taking of matters in the beginning. Not that he had a suspicion of Rex, but that he remembered that Dick was always a loose fish. The even current of the *dilettante's* life became disturbed. He grew pale and hollow eyed. His digestion was impaired. He ceased to take the interest in china which the importance of that article demanded. In a word, he grew despondent as to his fitness for his mission in life. Lady Ellinor saw a change in her brother. He became morose, peevish, excitable. She went privately to

the family doctor, who shrugged his shoulders. "There is no danger," said he, "if he is kept quiet; keep him quiet, and he will live for years, *but* his father died of heart disease, you know." Lady Ellinor, upon this, wrote a long letter to Mr. Richard, who was at Paris, repeated the doctor's opinions, and begged him to come over at once. Mr. Richard replied that some horse-racing matter of great importance occupied his attention, but that he would be at his rooms in Clarges Street (he had long ago established a town house) on the 14th, and would "go into matters." "I have lost a good deal of money lately, my dear mother," said Mr. Richard, "and the present will be a good opportunity to make a final settlement." The fact was, that John Rex, now three years in undisturbed possession, considered that the moment had arrived for the execution of his *grand coup*—the carrying off at one swoop of the whole of the fortune he had gambled for.



CHAPTER III.

EXTRACTED FROM THE DIARY OF THE REV.
JAMES NORTH.

MAY 12th.—Landed to-day at Norfolk Island, and have been introduced to my new abode, situated some eleven hundred miles from Sydney. A solitary rock in the tropical ocean, the island seems indeed, a fit place of banishment. It is about seven miles long and four broad. The most remarkable natural object is of course the Norfolk Island pine, which rears its stately head a hundred feet above the surrounding forest. The appearance of the place is very wild and beautiful, bringing to my mind the description of the romantic islands of the Pacific, which old geographers dwell upon so fondly. Lemon, lime, and guava

trees abound, also oranges, grapes, figs, bananas, peaches, pomegranates, and pine-apples. The climate just now is hot and muggy. The approach to Kingstown—as the barracks and huts are called—is properly difficult. A long low reef—probably originally a portion of the barren rocks of Nepean and Philip Islands, which rise east and west of the settlement—fronts the bay and obstructs the entrance of vessels. We were landed in boats through an opening in this reef, and our vessel stands on and off within signalling distance. The surf washes almost against the walls of the military roadway that leads to the barracks. The social aspect of the place fills me with horror. There seems neither discipline nor order. On our way to the Commandant's house we passed a low dilapidated building, where the men were at work grinding maize, and at the sight of us they commenced whistling, hooting, and shouting, using the most disgusting language. Three warders were near, but no attempt was made to check this unseemly exhibition.

May 14th.—I sit down to write with as much reluctance as though I were about to relate my experience of a journey through a sewer.

First, to the prisoners' barracks, which stand

on an area of about three acres, surrounded by a lofty wall. A road runs between this wall and the sea. The barracks are three storeys high, and hold seven hundred and ninety men (let me remark here that there are more than two thousand men on the island.) There are twenty-two wards in this place. Each ward runs the depth of the building, viz., eighteen feet, and in consequence is simply a funnel for hot or cold air to blow through. When the ward is filled, the men's heads lie under the windows. The largest ward contains a hundred men, the smallest fifteen. They sleep in hammocks, slung close to each other as on board ship, in two lines, with a passage down the centre. There is a wardsmen to each ward. He is selected by the prisoners, and is generally a man of the worst character. He is supposed to keep order, but of course he never attempts to do so ; indeed, as he is locked up in the ward every night from six o'clock in the evening until sunrise, *without light*, it is possible that he might get maltreated did he make himself obnoxious.

The barracks look upon the Barrack Square, which is filled with lounging prisoners. The windows of the hospital-ward also look upon Barrack Square, and the *prisoners* are in constant communication

with the patients. The hospital is a low stone building, capable of containing about twenty men, and faces the beach. I placed my hands on the wall, and found it damp. An ulcerous prisoner said the dampness was owing to the heavy surf constantly rolling so close beneath the building. There are two gaols, the old and the new. The old gaol stands near the sea, close to the landing-place. Outside it, at the door, is the Gallows. I touched it as I passed in. This engine is the first thing which greets the eyes of a newly-arrived prisoner. The new gaol is barely completed, is of a pentagonal shape, and has eighteen radiating cells of a pattern approved by some wiseacre in England, who thinks that to prevent a man from seeing his fellow-men is *not* the way to drive him mad. In the old gaol are twenty-four prisoners, all heavily ironed, awaiting trial by the visiting Commission, from Hobart Town. Some of these poor ruffians, having committed their offences just after the last sitting of the Commission, have already been in gaol upwards of eleven months !

At six o'clock we saw the men mustered. I read prayers before the muster, and was surprised to find that some of the prisoners

attended, while some strolled about the yard, whistling, singing, and joking. The muster is a farce. The prisoners are not mustered outside and then marched to their wards, but they rush into the barracks indiscriminately, and place themselves dressed or undressed in their hammocks. A convict sub-overseer then calls out the names, and somebody replies. If an answer is returned to each name, all is considered right. The lights are taken away, and save for a few minutes at eight o'clock, when the good-conduct men are let in, the ruffians are left to their own devices until morning. Knowing what I know of the customs of convicts, my heart sickens when I in imagination put myself in the place of a newly-transported man, plunged from six at night until daybreak into that foetid den of worse than wild beasts.

May 15th—There is a place enclosed between high walls adjoining the convict barracks, called the Lumber Yard. This is where the prisoners mess. It is roofed on two sides, and contains tables and benches. Six hundred men can mess here perhaps, but as seven hundred are always driven into it, it follows that the weakest men are compelled to sit on the

ground. A more disorderly sight than this yard at meal times I never beheld. The cook-houses are adjoining it, and the men bake their meal-bread there. Outside the cook-house door the firewood is piled, and fires are made in all directions on the ground, round which sit the prisoners, frying their rations of fresh pork, baking their hominy cakes, chatting, and even smoking.

The lumber yard is a sort of Alsatia, to which the hunted prisoner retires. I don't think the boldest constable on the island would venture into that place to pick out a man from the seven hundred. If he did go in I don't think he would come out again alive.

16th May.—A sub-overseer, a man named Hankey, has been talking to me. He says that there are some forty of the oldest and worst prisoners who form what he calls the "Ring;" and that the members of this Ring are bound by an oath to support each other, and to avenge the punishment of any of their number. In proof of his assertions he instanced two cases of English prisoners who had refused to join in some crime, and had informed the Commandant of the proceedings

of the "Ring." They were found in the morning strangled in their hammocks. An inquiry was held, but not a man out of the ninety in the ward would speak a word.

I dread the task that is before me. How can I attempt to preach piety and morality to these men? How can I attempt even to save the less villainous?

17th May.—Visited the wards to-day, and returned in despair. The condition of things is worse than I expected. It is not to be written. The newly-arrived English prisoners—and some of their histories are most touching—are insulted by the language and demeanour of the hardened miscreants who are the refuse of Port Arthur and Cockatoo Island. The vilest crimes are perpetrated as jests. There are creatures who openly defy authority, whose language and conduct is such as was never before seen or heard out of Bedlam. There are men who are known to have murdered their companions, and who boast of it. With these the English farm labourer, the riotous and ignorant mechanic, the victim of perjury or mistake, are indiscriminately herded. With them are mixed Chinamen from Hong-Kong, the aborigines

of New Holland, West Indian blacks, Greeks, Caffres, and Malays, soldiers for desertion, idiots, madmen, pigstealers, and pickpockets. The dreadful place seems set apart for all that is hideous and vile in our common nature. In its recklessness, its insubordination, its filth, and its despair, it realizes to my mind the popular notion of hell.

May 21st.—Entered to-day officially upon my duties as Religious Instructor at the settlement.

An occurrence took place this morning which shows the dangerous condition of the "Ring." I accompanied Mr. Pounce to the Lumber Yard, and, on our entry, we observed a man in the crowd round the cook-house deliberately smoking. The Chief Constable of the Island—my old friend Troke, of Port Arthur—seeing that this exhibition attracted Pounce's notice, pointed out the man to an assistant. The assistant, Jacob Gimblett, advanced and desired the prisoner to surrender the pipe. The man plunged his hands into his pockets, and, with a gesture of the most profound contempt, walked away to that part of the mess-shed where the "Ring" congregate.

“Take the scoundrel to gaol!” cried Troke.

No one moved, but the man at the gate that leads through the carpenter’s shop into barracks, called to us to come out, saying that the prisoners would never suffer the man to be taken. Pounce, however, with more determination than I gave him credit for, kept his ground, and insisted that so flagrant a breach of discipline should not be suffered to pass unnoticed. Thus urged, Mr. Troke pushed through the crowd, and made for the spot whither the man had withdrawn himself.

The yard was buzzing like a disturbed hive, and I momentarily expected that a rush would be made upon us. In a few moments the prisoner appeared, attended by, rather than in the custody of, the Chief Constable of the island. He advanced to the unlucky assistant constable, who was standing close to me, and asked, “What have you ordered me to gaol for?” The man made some reply, advising him to go quietly, when the convict raised his fist, and deliberately felled the man to the ground.

“You had better retire, gentlemen,” said Troke. “I see them getting out their knives.”

We made for the gate, and the crowd closed

in like a sea upon the two constables. I fully expected murder, but in a few moments Troke and Gimblett appeared, borne along by a mass of men, dusty, but unharmed, and having the convict between them. He sulkily raised a hand as he passed me, either to rectify the position of his straw hat, or to offer a tardy apology. A more wanton, unprovoked, and flagrant outrage than that of which this man was guilty I never witnessed. It is customary for "the old dogs," as the experienced convicts are called, to use the most opprobrious language to their officers, and to this a deaf ear is usually turned, but I never before saw a man wantonly strike a constable. I fancy that the act was done out of bravado. Troke informed me that the man's name is Rufus Dawes, and that he is the leader of the Ring, and considered the worst man on the island; that to secure him he (Troke) was obliged to use the language of expostulation; and that, but for the presence of an officer accredited by his Excellency, he dared not have acted as he had done.

This is the same man, then, whom I injured at Port Arthur. Seven years of "discipline" don't seem to have done him much good. His sentence is "life"—a lifetime in this

place! Troke says that he was the terror of Port Arthur, and that they sent him here when a "weeding" of the prisoners was made. He has been here four years. Poor wretch!

24th May.—After prayers, I saw Dawes. He was confined in the Old Gaol, and seven others were in the cell with him. He came out at my request, and stood leaning against the door-post. He was much changed from the man I remember. Seven years ago he was a stalwart, upright, *handsome* man. He has become a beetle-browed, sullen, slouching ruffian. His hair is grey, though he cannot be more than forty years of age, and his frame has lost that just proportion of parts which once made him almost graceful. His face has also grown like other convict faces—how hideously alike they all are!—and, save for his black eyes and a peculiar trick he has of compressing his lips, I should not have recognized him. How habitual sin and misery suffice to brutalize "the human face divine!" I said but little, for the other prisoners were listening, eager, as it appeared to me, to witness my discomfiture. It is evident that Rufus Dawes had been accustomed to meet the ministrations of my predecessor with insolence.

I spoke to him for a few minutes, only saying how foolish it was to rebel against an authority superior in strength to himself. He did not answer, and the only emotion he evinced during the interview was when I reminded him that we had met before. He shrugged one shoulder, as if in pain or anger, and seemed about to speak, but casting his eyes upon the group in the cell, relapsed into silence again. I must get speech with him alone. One can do nothing with a man if seven other devils worse than himself are locked up with him.

I sent for Hankey, and asked him about cells. He says that the gaol is crowded to suffocation. "Solitary confinement" is a mere name. There are six men, each sentenced to solitary confinement, in a cell together. This cell is called the "nunnery." It is small, and the six men were naked to the waist when I entered, the perspiration pouring in streams off their naked bodies! It is disgusting to write of such things.

26th June.—Pounce has departed in the *Lady Franklin* for Hobart Town, and it is rumoured that we are to have a new commandant. The *Lady Franklin* is commanded

by an old man named Blunt, a *protégé* of Frere's, and a fellow to whom I have taken one of my inexplicable and unreasoning dislikes.

Saw Rufus Dawes this morning. He continues sullen and morose. His papers are very bad. He is perpetually up for punishment. I am informed that he and a man named Eastwood, nicknamed Jacky Jacky, glory in being the leaders of the "Ring," and that they openly avow themselves weary of life. Can it be that the unmerited flogging which the poor creature got at Port Arthur has aided, with other sufferings, to bring him to this horrible state of mind? It is quite possible. Oh, James North, remember your own crime, and pray Heaven to let you redeem one soul at least, to plead for your own at the Judgment Seat.

June 30th.—I took a holiday this afternoon, and walked in the direction of Mount Pitt. The island lay at my feet like—as sings Mrs. Frere's favourite poet—"a summer isle of Eden lying in dark purple sphere of sea." Sophocles has the same idea in the *Philoctetes*, but I can't quote it. Note: I measured a pine twenty-three feet in circumference. I

followed a little brook that runs from the hills, and winds through thick undergrowths of creeper and blossom, until it reaches a lovely valley surrounded by lofty trees, whose branches, linked together by the luxurious grape-vine, form an arching bower of verdure. Here stands the ruin of an old hut, formerly inhabited by the early settlers ; lemons, figs, and guaves are thick ; while amid the shrub and cane a large convolvulus is intertwined, and stars the green with its purple and crimson flowers.

I sat down here, and had a smoke. It seems that the former occupant of my rooms at the settlement read French ; for in searching for a book to bring with me—I never walk without a book—I found and pocketed a volume of Balzac. It proved to be a portion of the *Vie Privée* series, and I stumbled upon a story called *La Fausse Maitresse*. With calm belief in the Paris of his imagination—where Marcas was a politician, Nucingen a banker, Gobseck a money-lender, and Vautrin a candidate for some such place as this—Balzac introduces me to a Pole by name Paz, who, loving the wife of his friend, devotes himself to watch over her happiness and her husband's interest. The husband gambles.

and is profligate. Paz informs the wife that the leanness which hazard and debauchery have caused to the domestic exchequer is due to *his* extravagance, the husband having lent him money. She does not believe, and Paz feigns an intrigue with a circus-rider in order to lull all suspicions. She says to her adored spouse, "Get rid of this extravagant friend! Away with him! He is a profligate, a gambler! A drunkard!" Paz finally departs, and when he has gone, the lady finds out the poor Pole's worth. The story does not end satisfactorily. Balzac was too great a master of his art for that. In real life the curtain never falls on a comfortably-finished drama. The play goes on eternally.

I have been thinking of the story all the evening. A man who loves his friend's wife, and devotes his energies to increase her happiness by concealing from her her husband's follies! Surely none but Balzac would have hit upon such a notion. "A man who loves his friend's wife."—Asmodeus, I write no more! I have ceased to converse with thee for so long that I blush to confess all that I have in my heart.—I will *not* confess it, so that shall suffice.



CHAPTER IV.

EXTRACTED FROM THE DIARY OF THE REV.
JAMES NORTH.

AUGUST 24th.—There has been but one entry in my journal since the 30th June, that which records the advent of our new Commandant, who, as I expected, is Captain Maurice Frere.

So great have been the changes which have taken place, that I scarcely know how to record them. Captain Frere has realized my worst anticipations. He is brutal, vindictive, and domineering. His knowledge of prisons and prisoners gives him an advantage over Burgess, otherwise he much resembles that murderous animal. He has but one thought—to keep the prisoners in subjection. So long as the island is quiet, he cares not whether

the men live or die. "I was sent down here to keep order," said he to me, a few days after his arrival, "and by God, sir, I'll do it!"

. He has done it, I must admit ; but at a cost of a legacy of hatred to himself that he may some day regret to have earned. He has organized three parties of police. One patrols the fields, one is on guard at stores and public buildings, and the third is employed as a detective force. There are two hundred soldiers on the island, and the officer in charge, Captain McNab, has been induced by Frere to increase their duties in many ways. The cords of discipline are suddenly drawn tight. For the disorder which prevailed when I landed, Frere has substituted a sudden and excessive rigour. Any officer found giving the smallest piece of tobacco to a prisoner is liable to removal from the island. The tobacco which grows wild has been rooted up and destroyed lest the men should obtain a leaf of it. The privilege of having a pannikin of hot water when the gangs came in from field labour in the evening has been withdrawn. The shepherds, hut-keepers, and all other prisoners, whether at the stations of Longridge or the Cascades (where the English convicts are stationed), are forbidden to keep

a parrot or any other bird. The plaiting of straw hats during the prisoners' leisure hours is also prohibited. At the settlement where the "old hands" are located, railed boundaries have been erected, beyond which no prisoner must pass unless to work. Two days ago Job Dodd, a negro, let his jacket fall over the boundary rails, crossed them to recover it, and was severely flogged. The floggings are hideously frequent. On flogging mornings I have seen the ground where the men stood at the triangles saturated with blood, as if a bucket of blood had been spilled on it, covering a space three feet in diameter, and running out in various directions, in little streams two or three feet long. At the same time, let me say, with that strict justice I force myself to mete out to those whom I dislike, that the island is in a condition of abject submission. There is not much chance of mutiny. The men go to their work without a murmur, and slink to their dormitories like whipped hounds to kennel. The gaols and solitary (!) cells are crowded with prisoners, and each day sees fresh sentences for fresh crimes. It is crime here to do anything but live.

The method by which Captain Frere has brought about this repose of desolation is

characteristic of him. He sets every man as a spy upon his neighbour, awes the more daring into obedience by the display of a ruffianism more outrageous than their own, and raising the worst scoundrels in the place to office, compels them to find "cases" for punishment. Perfidy is rewarded. It has been made part of a convict-policeman's duty to search a fellow-prisoner anywhere and at any time. This searching is often conducted in a wantonly rough and disgusting manner; and if resistance be offered, the man resisting can be knocked down by a blow from the searcher's bludgeon. Inquisitorial vigilance and indiscriminating harshness prevail everywhere, and the lives of hundreds of prisoners are reduced to a continual agony of terror and self-loathing.

"It is impossible, Captain Frere," said I, one day, during the initiation of this system, "to think that these villains whom you have made constables will do their duty."

He replied, "They *must* do their duty. If they are indulgent to the prisoners, they know I shall flog 'em. If they do what I tell 'em, they'll make themselves so hated that they'd have their own father up to the triangles to save themselves being sent back to the ranks."

“You treat them then like slave-keepers of a wild beast den. They must flog the animals to avoid being flogged themselves.”

“Ay,” said he, with his coarse laugh, “and having once flogged ’em, they’d do anything rather than be put in the cage, don’t ye see !”

It is horrible to think of this sort of logic being used by a man who has a wife, and friends and enemies. It is the logic that the Keeper of the Tormented would use, I should think. I am sick unto death of the place. It makes me an unbeliever in the social charities. It takes out of penal science anything it may possess of nobility or worth. It is cruel debasing, inhuman.

August 26th.—Saw Rufus Dawes again to-day. His usual bearing is ostentatiously rough and brutal. He has sunk to a depth of self-abasement in which he takes a delight in his degradation. This condition is one familiar to me.

He is working in the chain-gang to which Hankey was made sub-overseer. Blind Mooney, an ophthalmic prisoner, who was removed from the gang to hospital, told me that there was a plot to murder Hankey, but that Dawes, to whom he had shown some

kindness, had prevented it. I saw Hankey and told him of this, asking him if he had been aware of the plot. He said "No," falling into a great tremble. "Major Pratt promised me a removal," said he. "I expected it would come to this." I asked him why Dawes defended him; and after some trouble he told me, exacting from me a promise that I would not acquaint the Commandant. It seems that one morning last week Hankey had gone up to Captain Frere's house with a return from Troke, and coming back through the garden had plucked a flower. Dawes had asked him for this flower, offering two days' rations for it. Hankey, who is not a bad-hearted man, gave him the sprig. "There were tears in his eyes as he took it," said he.

There must be some way to get at this man's heart, bad as he seems to be.

August 28th.—Hankey was murdered yesterday. He applied to be removed from the gaol gang, but Frere refused. "I never let my men 'funk,'" he said. "If they've threatened to murder you, I'll keep you there another month in spite of 'em."

Some one who overheard this reported it to the gang, and they set upon the unfortunate

gaoler yesterday, and beat his brains out with their shovels. Troke says that the wretch who was foremost cried, "There's for you ; and if your master don't take care, he'll get served the same one of these days !" The gang were employed at building a reef in the sea, and were working up to their armpits in water. Hankey fell into the surf, and never moved after the first blow. I saw the gang, and Dawes said,

"It was Frere's fault ; he should have let the man go !"

"I am surprised you did not interfere," said I.

"I did all I could," was the man's answer. "What's a life more or less *here*."

This occurrence has spread consternation among the overseers, and they have addressed a "round robin" to the Commandant, praying to be relieved from their positions.

The way Frere has dealt with this petition is characteristic of him, and fills me at once with admiration and disgust. He came down with it in his hand to the gaol-gang, walked into the yard, shut the gate, and said, "I've just got this from my overseers. They say they're afraid you'll murder them as you murdered Hankey. Now, if you want to murder,

murder *me*. Here I am. Step out, one of you." All this, said in a tone of the most galling contempt, did not move them. I saw a dozen pairs of eyes flash hatred, but the bull-dog courage of the man overawed them here, as, I am told, it had done in Sydney. It would have been easy to kill him then and there, and his death, I am told, is sworn among them; but no one raised a finger. The only man who moved was Rufus Dawes, and he checked himself instantly. Frere, with a recklessness of which I did not think him capable, stepped up to this terror of the prison, and ran his hands lightly down his sides, as is the custom with constables when "searching" a man. Dawes—who is of a fierce temper—turned crimson at this bravado, and, I thought, would have struck him, but he did not. Frere then—still unarmed and alone—proceeded to taunt the man, saying, "How are you, Dawes? Do you think of bolting again, Dawes? Have you made any more boats?"

"You Devil!" said the chained man, in a voice pregnant with such weight of unborn murder, that the gang winced.

"You'll find me one," said Frere, with a laugh; and, turning to me, continued, in the

same jesting tone, "There's a penitent for you, Mr. North—try your hand on him."

I was speechless at his audacity, and must have shown my disgust in my face, for he coloured slightly, and as we were leaving the yard, endeavoured to excuse himself, by saying that it was no use preaching to stones, and such doubly-dyed villains as this Dawes were past hope. "I know the ruffian of old," said he. "He came out in the ship from England with me, and tried to raise a mutiny on board. He was the man who nearly murdered my wife. He has never been out of irons—except then and when he escaped—for the last eighteen years; and as he's three life sentences, he's like to die in 'em."

A monstrous wretch and criminal, evidently, and yet I feel a strange sympathy with this outcast.



CHAPTER V.

MR. RICHARD DEVINE SURPRISED.

THE town house of Mr. Richard Devine was in Clarges Street. Not that the very modest mansion there situated was the only establishment of which Richard Devine was master. Mr. John Rex had expensive tastes. He neither shot nor hunted, so he had no capital invested in Scotch moors or Leicestershire hunting-boxes. But his stables were the wonder of London, he owned almost a racing village near Doncaster, kept a yacht at Cowes, and, in addition to a house in Paris, paid the rent of a villa at Brompton. He belonged to several clubs of the faster sort, and might have lived like a prince at any one of them had he been so

mind ; but a constant and haunting fear of discovery—which three years of unquestioned ease and unbridled riot had not dispelled—led him to prefer the privacy of his own house, where he could choose his own society. The house in Clarges Street was decorated in conformity with the tastes of its owner. The pictures were pictures of horses, the books were records of races, or novels purporting to describe sporting life. Mr. Francis Wade, waiting on the morning of the 20th April, 1846, for the coming of his nephew, sighed as he thought of the cultured quiet of Northend House.

Mr. Richard appeared in his dressing-gown. Three years of good living and hard drinking had deprived his figure of its athletic beauty. He was past forty years of age, and the sudden cessation from severe bodily toil to which in his active life as a convict and squatter he had been accustomed, had increased Rex's natural proneness to fat, and instead of being portly he had become gross. His cheeks were inflamed with the frequent application of hot and rebellious liquors to his blood. His hands were swollen, and not so steady as of yore. His whiskers were streaked with unhealthy grey. His eyes, bright and black as

ever, lurked in a thicket of crow's feet. He had become prematurely bald—a sure sign of mental or bodily excess. He spoke with assumed heartiness, in a boisterous tone of affected ease.

“Ha, ha! My dear uncle, sit down. Delighted to see you. Have you breakfasted?—of course you have. *I* was up rather late last night. Quite sure you won't have anything. A glass of wine? No—then sit down and tell me all the news of Hampstead.”

“Thank you, Richard,” said the old gentleman, a little stiffly, “but I want some serious talk with you. What do you intend to do with the property? This indecision worries me. Either relieve me of my trust, or be guided by my advice.”

“Well, the fact is,” said Richard, with a very ugly look on his face, “the fact is—and you may as well know it at once—I am much pushed for money.”

“Pushed for money!” cried Mr. Wade, in horror. “Why, Purkiss said the property was worth twenty thousand a year.”

“So it might have been—five years ago—but my horse-racing, and betting, and other amusements, concerning which you need not too curiously inquire, have reduced its value considerably.”

He spoke recklessly and roughly. It was evident that success had but developed his ruffianism. His "dandyism" was only comparative. The impulse of poverty and scheming which led him to affect the "gentleman" having been removed, the natural brutality of his nature showed itself freely. Mr. Francis Wade took a pinch of snuff with a sharp motion of distaste. "I do not want to hear of your debaucheries," he said; "our name has been sufficiently disgraced in my hearing."

"What is got over the devil's back goes under his belly," replied Mr. Richard, coarsely. "My old father got his money by dirtier ways than these in which I spend it. As villainous an old scoundrel and skin-flint as ever poisoned a seaman, I'll go bail."

Mr. Francis rose. "You need not revile your father, Richard—he left you all."

"Ay, but by pure accident. He didn't mean it. If he hadn't died in the nick of time, that unhung murderous villain, Maurice Frere, would have come in for it. By the way," he added, with a change of tone, "do you ever hear anything of Maurice?"

"I have not heard for some years," said Mr. Wade. "He is something in the Convict Department at Sydney, I think."

“Is he?” said Mr. Richard, with a shiver. “Hope he’ll stop there. Well, but about business. The fact is, that—that I am thinking of selling everything.”

“Selling everything!”

“Yes. ’Pon my soul I am. The Hampstead place and all.”

“Sell Northend House!” cried poor Mr. Wade, in bewilderment. “Why, the carvings by Grinling Gibbons are the finest in England.”

“I can’t help that,” laughed Mr. Richard, ringing the bell. “I want cash, and cash I must have.—Breakfast, Smithers.—I’m going to travel.”

Francis Wade was breathless with astonishment. Educated and reared as he had been, he would as soon have thought of proposing to sell St. Paul’s Cathedral, as to sell the casket which held his treasures of art,—his coins, his coffee-cups, his pictures, and his “proofs before letters.”

“Surely, Richard, you are not in earnest?” he gasped.

“I am, indeed.”

“But—but who will buy it?”

“Plenty of people. I shall cut it up into building allotments. Besides, they are talk-

ing of a suburban line, with a terminus at St. John's Wood, which will cut the garden in half. You are quite sure you've breakfasted? Then pardon *me*."

"Richard, you are jesting with me! You will never let them do such a thing!"

"I'm thinking of a trip to America," said Mr. Richard, cracking an egg. "I am sick of Europe. After all, what is the good of a man like me pretending to belong to 'an old family,' with 'a seat' and all that humbug? Money is the thing now, my dear uncle. Hard cash! That's the ticket for soup, you may depend."

"Then what do you propose doing, sir?"

"To buy my mother's life interest as provided, realize upon the property, and travel," said Mr. Richard, helping himself to potted grouse.

"You amaze me, Richard. You confound me. Of course, you can do as you please. But so sudden a determination. The old house—scattered—vases—coins—pictures—I really—Well, it is your property, of course,—and,—and—I wish you a very good morning!"

"I mean to do as I please," soliloquized Rex, as he resumed his breakfast. "Let him

sell his rubbish by auction, and go and live abroad, in Germany or Jerusalem if he likes, the farther the better for me. I'll sell off the property and make myself scarce. A trip to America will benefit my health."

A knock at the door made him start.

"Come in! Curse it, how nervous I'm getting. What's that? Letters? Give them to me; and why the devil don't you put the brandy on the table, Smithers?"

He drank some of the spirit greedily, and began to open his correspondence.

"Cussed brute," said Mr. Smithers, outside the door. "He couldn't use wuss langwidge if he was a dook, dam 'im!—Yessir," he added, suddenly, as a roar from his master recalled him.

"When did *this* come?" asked Mr. Richard, holding out a letter more than usually disfigured with stampings.

"Lars night, sir. It's bin to 'Amstead, sir, and come down directed with the h'others." The angry glare of the black eyes induced him to add, "I 'ope there's nothink wrong, sir?"

"Nothing, you infernal ass and idiot," burst out Mr. Richard, white with rage, "except that I should have had this instantly.

Can't you see it's marked *urgent*? Can you read? Can you spell? There, that will do. No lies. Get out!"

Left to himself again, Mr. Richard walked hurriedly up and down the chamber, wiped his forehead, drank a tumbler of brandy, and finally sat down and re-read the letter. It was short, but terribly to the purpose.

"THE GEORGE HOTEL, PLYMOUTH,
17th April, 1846.

"MY DEAR JACK,—

"I have found you out, you see. Never mind how just at present. I know all about your proceedings, and unless Mr. Richard Devine receives his *wife* with due propriety, he'll find himself in the custody of the police. Telegraph, dear, to Mrs. Richard Devine at above address.

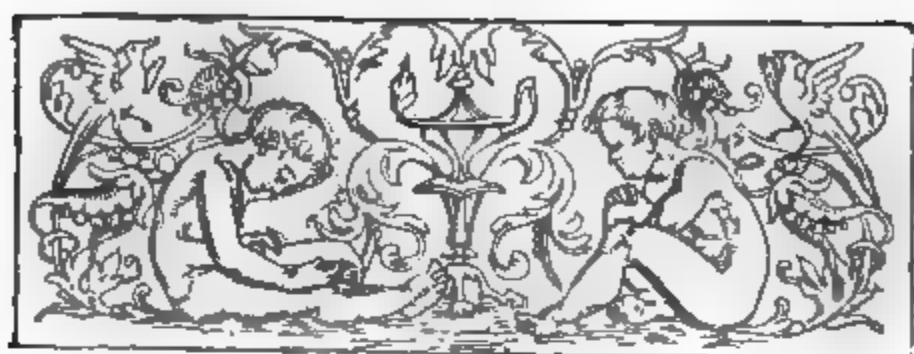
"Yours as ever, Jack,
SARAH.

"To Richard Devine, Esq.,
"Northend House,
"Hampstead."

The blow was unexpected and severe. It was hard, in the very high tide and flush of assured success, to be thus plucked back into the old bondage. Despite the affectionate tone of the letter, he knew the woman with whom he had to deal. For some furious minutes he sat motionless, gazing at the letter. He did

not speak—men seldom do under such circumstances—but his thoughts ran in this fashion: “Here is this cursed woman again! Just as I was congratulating myself on my freedom. How did she discover me? Small use asking that. What shall I do? I can do nothing. It is absurd to run away, for I shall be caught. Besides, I’ve no money. My account at Mastermann’s is overdrawn two thousand pounds. If I bolt at all, I must bolt at once—within twenty-four hours. Rich as I am, I don’t suppose I could raise more than five thousand pounds in that time. These things take a day or two, say forty-eight hours. In forty-eight hours I could raise twenty thousand pounds, but forty-eight hours is too long. Curse the woman! I know her! How in the fiend’s name did she discover me? It’s a bad job.—However, she’s not inclined to be gratuitously disagreeable. How lucky I never married again! I had better make terms and trust to fortune. After all, she’s been a good friend to me.—Poor Sally!—I might have rotted on that infernal Eaglehawk Neck, if it hadn’t been for her. She is not a bad sort. Handsome woman, too. I may make it up with her. I shall have to sell off and go away after all.—It might be worse.—I dare say the

property's worth three hundred thousand pounds. Not bad for a start in America. And I may get rid of her yet. Yes. I must give in.—Oh, curse her!—[*ringing the bell*] Smithers!" [*Smithers appears.*] "A telegraph form and a cab! Stay. Pack me a dressing-bag, I shall have to go away for a day or so. [*Sotto voce*—I'd better see her myself.—[*Aloud*—Bring me a Bradshaw! [*Sotto voce*—Damn the woman!"



CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH THE CHAPLAIN IS TAKEN ILL.

THOUGH the house of the Commandant of Norfolk Island was comfortable and well furnished, and though, of necessity, all that was most hideous in the "discipline" of the place was hidden, the loathing with which Sylvia had approached the last and most dreaded abiding place of the elaborate convict system, under which it had been her misfortune to live had not decreased. The sights and sounds of pain and punishment surrounded her. She could not look out of her windows without a shudder. She dreaded each evening when her husband returned, lest he should blurt out some new atrocity. She feared to ask him in the morn-

ing whither he was going, lest he should thrill her with the announcement of some fresh punishment.

“I wish, Maurice, we had never come here,” said she, piteously, when he recounted to her the scene of the gaol-gang. “These unhappy men will do you some frightful injury one of these days.”

“Stuff!” said her husband. “They’ve not the courage. I’d take the best man among them, and dare him to touch me.”

“I cannot think how you like to witness so much misery and villainy. It is horrible to me to think of.”

“Our tastes differ, my dear.—Jenkins! Confound you! Jenkins, I say.” The convict-servant entered. “Where is the charge-book? I’ve told you always to have it ready for me. Why don’t you do as you are told? You idle, lazy scoundrel! I suppose you were yarning in the cook-house, or——”

“If you please, sir——”

“Don’t answer me, sir. Give me the book.” Taking it and running his finger down the leaves, he commented on the list of offences to which he would be called upon in the morning to mete out judgment.

“*Meer-a-seek, having a pipe*—the rascally

Hindoo scoundrel!—*Benjamin Pellett, having jat in his possession. Miles Byrne, not walking fast enough—We must enliven Mr. Byrne. Thomas Twist, having a pipe and striking a light. W. Barnes, not in place at muster; says he was ‘washing himself’—I’ll wash him! John Richards, missing muster and insolence. John Gateby, insolence and insubordination. James Hopkins, insolence and foul language. Rufus Dawes, gross insolence, refusing to work—Ah! we must look after you. You are a parson’s man, are you? I’ll break your spirit, my man, or I’ll——Sylvia!”*

“Yes.”

“Your friend Dawes is doing credit to his bringing up.”

“What do you mean?”

“That infernal villain and reprobate, Dawes. He is fitting himself faster for——”

She interrupted him. “Maurice, I wish you would not use such language. You know I dislike it.” She spoke coldly and sadly, as one who knows that remonstrance is vain, and is yet constrained to remonstrate.

“Oh, dear! My Lady Proper! can’t bear to hear her husband swear. How refined we’re getting!”

“There, I did not mean to annoy you,”

said she, wearily. "Don't let us quarrel, for goodness' sake."

He went away noisily, and she sat looking at the carpet wearily. A noise roused her. She looked up and saw North. Her face beamed instantly. "Ah! Mr. North, I did not expect you. What brings you here? You'll stay to dinner, of course." (She rang the bell without waiting for a reply). "Mr. North dines here; place a chair for him. And have you brought me the book? I have been looking for it."

"Here it is," said North, producing a volume of 'Monte Christo.' "I envy you."

She seized the book with avidity, and, after running her eyes over the pages, turned inquiringly to the fly-leaf.

"It belongs to my predecessor," said North, as though in answer to her thought. "He seem to have been a great reader of French. I have found many French novels of his."

"I thought clergymen never read French novels," said Sylvia, with a smile.

"There are French novels and French novels," said North. "Stupid people confound the good with the bad. I remember a worthy friend of mine in Sydney who soundly abused me for reading 'Rabelais,'

and when I asked him if *he* had read it, he said that he would sooner cut his hand off than open it. Admirable judge of its merits !”

“ But is this really good ? Papa told me it was rubbish.”

“ It is a romance, but, in my opinion, a very fine one. The notion of the sailor being taught in prison by the priest, and sent back into the world, an accomplished gentleman, to work out his vengeance, is superb.”

“ Now, now—you are telling me,” laughed she ; and then, with feminine perversity, “ Go on, what is the story ?”

“ Only that of an unjustly imprisoned man, who, escaping by a marvel, and becoming rich—as Dr. Johnson says, ‘ beyond the dreams of avarice,’ devotes his life and fortune to revenge himself.”

“ And does he ?”

“ He does, upon all his enemies save one.”

“ And he— ?”

“ *She*—was the wife of his greatest enemy, and Dantès spared her because he loved her.”

Sylvia turned away her head. “ It seems interesting enough,” said she, coldly.

There was an awkward silence for a mo-

ment, which each seemed afraid to break. North bit his lips, as though regretting what he had said. Mrs. Frere beat her foot on the floor, and at length raising her eyes, and meeting those of the clergyman fixed upon her face, rose hurriedly, and went to meet her returning husband.

“Come to dinner, of course!” said Frere, who, though he disliked the clergyman, yet was glad of anybody who would help him to pass a cheerful evening.

“I came to bring Mrs. Frere a book.”

“Ah! She reads too many books; she’s always reading books. It is not a good thing to be always poring over print, is it, North? You have some influence with her; tell her so. Come, I am hungry.”

He spoke with that affectation of jollity with which husbands of his calibre veil their bad temper.

Sylvia had her defensive armour on in a twinkling.

“Of course, you two men will be against me. When did two men ever disagree upon the subject of wifely duties? However, I shall read in spite of you. Do you know, Mr. North, that when I married I made a special agreement with Captain Frere that I

was not to be asked to sew on buttons for him ?”

“ Indeed !” said North, not understanding this change of humour.

“ And she never has from that hour,” said Frere, recovering his suavity at the sight of food. “ I never have a shirt fit to put on. Upon my word, there are a dozen in the drawer now.”

North perused his plate uncomfortably. A saying of omniscient Balzac occurred to him. “ *Le grand écueil est le ridicule,*” and his mind began to sound all sorts of philosophical depths, not of the most clerical character.

After dinner Maurice launched out into his usual topic—convict discipline. It was pleasant for him to get a listener ; for his wife, cold and unsympathetic, tacitly declined to enter into his schemes for the subduing of the refractory villains. “ You insisted on coming here,” she would say. “ I did not wish to come. I don’t like to talk of these things. Let us talk of something else.” When she adopted this method of procedure, he had no alternative but to submit, for he was afraid of her, after a fashion. In this ill-assorted match he was only apparently the master. He was a physical tyrant. For

him, a creature had but to be weak to be an object of contempt; and his gross nature triumphed over the finer one of his wife. Love had long since died out of their life. The young, impulsive, delicate girl, who had given herself to him seven years before, had been changed into a weary, suffering woman. The wife is what her husband makes her, and his rude animalism had made her the nervous invalid she was. Instead of love, he had awakened in her a distaste which at times amounted to disgust. We have neither the skill nor the boldness of that profound philosopher whose autopsy of the human heart awoke North's contemplation, and we will not presume to set forth in bare English the story of this marriage of the Minotaur. Let it suffice to say that Sylvia liked her husband least when he loved her most. In this repulsion lay her power over him. When the animal and spiritual natures cross each other, the nobler triumphs in fact if not in appearance. Maurice Frere, though his wife obeyed him, knew that he was inferior to her, and was afraid of the statue he had created. She was ice, but it was the artificial ice that chemists make in the midst of a furnace. Her coldness was at once her strength and her weak-

ness. When she chilled him, she commanded him.

Unwitting of the thoughts that possessed his guest, Frere chatted amicably. North said little, but drank a good deal. The wine, however, rendered him silent, instead of talkative. He drank that he might forget unpleasant memories, and drank without accomplishing his object. When the pair proceeded to the room where Mrs. Frere awaited them, Frere was boisterously good humoured, North silently misanthropic.

"Sing something, Sylvia!" said Frere, with the ease of possession, as one who should say to a living musical-box, "Play something."

"Oh, Mr. North doesn't care for music, and I'm not inclined to sing. Singing seems out of place here."

"Nonsense," said Frere. "Why should it be more out of place here than anywhere else?"

"Mrs. Frere means that mirth is in a manner unsuited to these melancholy surroundings," said North, out of his keener sense.

"Melancholy surroundings!" cried Frere, staring in turn at the piano, the ottomans, and the looking-glass. "Well, the house isn't as good

as the one in Sydney, but it's comfortable enough."

"You don't understand me, Maurice," said Sylvia. "This place is very gloomy to me. The thought of the unhappy men who are ironed and chained all about us makes me miserable."

"What stuff!" said Frere, now thoroughly roused. "The ruffians deserve all they get and more. Why should *you* make yourself wretched about them?"

"Poor men! How do we know the strength of their temptation, the bitterness of their repentance."

"Evil-doers earn their punishment," says North, in a hard voice, and taking up a book suddenly. "They must learn to bear it. No repentance can undo their sin."

"But surely there is mercy for the worst of evil-doers," urged Sylvia, gently.

North seemed disinclined or unable to reply, and nodded only.

"Mercy!" cried Frere. "I am not here to be merciful; I am here to keep these scoundrels in order, and by the Lord that made me, I'll do it!"

"Maurice, do not talk like that. Think how slight an accident might have made any

one of us like one of these men. What is the matter, Mr. North?"

Mr. North has suddenly turned pale.

"Nothing," returned the clergyman, gasping—"a sudden faintness!" The windows were thrown open, and the chaplain gradually recovered, as he did in Burgess's parlour, at Port Arthur, seven years ago. "I am liable to these attacks. A touch of heart disease, I think. I shall have to rest for a day or so."

"Ay, take a spell," said Frere; "you over-work yourself."

North, sitting, gasping and pale, smiles in a ghastly manner. "I—I will. If I do not appear for a week, Mrs. Frere, you will know the reason."

"A week! Surely it will not last so long as that," exclaims Sylvia.

The ambiguous "it" appears to annoy him, for he flushes painfully, replying, "Sometimes longer. It is a—um—uncertain," in a confused and shame-faced manner, and is luckily relieved by the entry of Jenkins.

"A message from Mr. Troke, sir."

"Troke! What's the matter now?"

"Dawes, sir, 's been violent and assaulted Mr. Troke. Mr. Troke said you'd left orders to be told at onst of the insubordination of prisoners."

“Quite right, where is he?”

“In the cells, I think, sir. They had a hard fight to get him there, I am told, your honour.”

“Had they? Give my compliments to Mr. Troke, and tell him that I shall have the pleasure of breaking Mr. Dawes’s spirit to-morrow morning at nine sharp.”

“Maurice,” said Sylvia, who had been listening to the conversation in undisguised alarm, “Do me a favour? Do not torment this man?”

“What makes you take a fancy to *him*?” asks her husband, with sudden unnecessary fierceness.

“Because his is one of the names which have been from my childhood synonymous with suffering and torture, because whatever wrong he may have done, his life-long punishment must have in some degree atoned for it.”

She spoke with an eager pity in her face that transfigured it. North devouring her with his glance, saw tears in her eyes.

“Does this look as if he had made atonement?” said Frere coarsely, slapping the letter.

“He is a bad man, I know, but——” she passed her hand over her forehead with the

old troubled gesture—"he cannot have been always bad. I think I have heard some good of him somewhere."

"Nonsense," said Frere, rising decisively. "Your fancies mislead you. Let me hear no more. The man is rebellious, and must be lashed back again to his duty. Come, North, we'll have a nip before you start."

"Mr. North, will not *you* plead for me?" suddenly cried poor Sylvia, her self-possession overthrown. "You have a heart to pity these suffering creatures."

But North, who seemed to have suddenly recalled his soul from some place where it had been wandering, draws himself aside, and with dry lips makes shift to say, "I cannot interfere with your husband, madam," and goes out almost rudely.

"You've made old North quite ill," said Frere, when he by-and-by returns, hoping by bluff ignoring of roughness on his own part to avoid reproach from his wife. "He drank half a bottle of brandy to steady his nerves before he went home, and swung out of the house like one possessed."

But Sylvia, occupied by her own thoughts, did not reply.



CHAPTER VII.

BREAKING A MAN'S SPIRIT.

THE insubordination of which Rufus Dawes had been guilty was, in this instance, insignificant. It was the custom of the newly-fledged constables of Captain Frere to enter the wards at night, armed with cutlasses, tramping about, and making a great noise. Mindful of the report of Pounce, they pulled the men roughly from their hammocks, examined their persons for concealed tobacco, and compelled them to open their mouths to see if any was inside. The men in Dawes's gang—to which Mr. Troke had an especial objection—were often searched more than once in a night, searched going to work, searched at meals, searched

going to prayers, searched coming out, and this in the roughest manner. Their sleep broken, and what little self-respect they might yet presume to retain harried out of them, the objects of this incessant persecution were ready to turn upon and kill their tormentors.

The great aim of Troke was to catch Dawes tripping, but the leader of the "Ring" was too wary. In vain had Troke, eager to sustain his reputation for sharpness, burst in upon the convict at all times and seasons. He had found nothing. In vain had he laid traps for him ; in vain had he "planted" figs of tobacco, and attaching long threads to them, waited in a bush hard by, until the pluck at the end of his line should give token that the fish had bitten. The experienced "old hand" was too acute for him. Filled with disgust and ambition, he determined upon an ingenious little trick. He was certain that Dawes possessed tobacco ; the thing was to find it upon him. Now, Rufus Dawes, holding aloof, as was his custom, from the majority of his companions, had made one friend—if so mindless and battered an old wreck could be called a friend—Blind Mooney. Perhaps this oddly-assorted friendship was brought about by two causes—one, that Mooney was the only man on the

island who knew more of the horrors of convictism than the leader of the Ring; the other, that Mooney was blind, and, to a moody, sullen man, subject to violent fits of passion, and a constant suspicion of all his fellow-creatures, a blind companion was more congenial than a sharp-eyed one.

Mooney was one of the "First Fleeters." He had arrived in Sydney fifty-seven years before, in the year 1789, and when he was transported he was fourteen years old. He had been through the whole round of servitude, had worked as a bondsman, had married, and been "up country," had been again sentenced, and was a sort of dismal patriarch of Norfolk Island, having been there at its former settlement. He had no friends. His wife was long since dead, and he stated, without contradiction, that his master, having taken a fancy to her, had despatched the uncomplaisant husband to imprisonment. Such cases were not uncommon.

One of the many ways in which Rufus Dawes had obtained the affection of the old blind man was the gift of such fragments of tobacco as he had himself from time to time secured. Troke knew this ; and on the evening in question hit upon an excellent plan.

Admitting himself noiselessly into the boatshed, where the gang slept, he crept close to the sleeping Dawes, and counterfeiting Mooney's mumbling utterance, asked for "some tobacco." Rufus Dawes was but half awake, and on repeating his request, Troke felt something put into his hand. He grasped Dawes's arm, and struck a light. He had got his man this time. Dawes had conveyed to his fancied friend a piece of tobacco almost as big as the top joint of his little finger.

One can understand the feelings of a man entrapped by such base means. Rufus Dawes no sooner saw the hated face of Warder Troke peering over his hammock, than he sprang out, and exerting to the utmost his powerful muscles, knocked Mr. Troke fairly off his legs into the arms of the in-coming constables. A desperate struggle took place, at the end of which, the convict, overpowered by numbers, was borne senseless to the cells, gagged, and chained to the ring-bolt on the bare flags. While in this condition he was savagely beaten by five or six constables.

To this maimed and manacled rebel was the Commandant ushered by Troke the next morning.

"Ha! ha! my man," said the Command-

ant. "Here you are again, you see. How do you like this sort of thing?"

Dawes, glaring, makes no answer.

"You shall have fifty lashes, my man," said Frere. "We'll see how you'll feel then!"

The fifty were duly administered, and the Commandant called the next day. The rebel was still mute.

"Give him fifty more, Mr. Troke. We'll see what he's made of."

One hundred and twenty lashes were inflicted in the course of the morning, but still the sullen convict refused to speak. He was then treated to fourteen days' solitary confinement in one of the new cells. On being brought out and confronted with his tormentor, he merely laughed. For this he was sent back for another fourteen days; and still remaining obdurate, was flogged again, and got fourteen days more. Had the chaplain then visited him, he might have found him open to consolation, but the chaplain—so it was stated—was sick. When brought out at the conclusion of his third confinement, he was found to be in so exhausted a condition, that the doctor ordered him to hospital. As soon as he was sufficiently recovered, Frere

visited him, and finding his "spirit" not yet "broken," ordered that he should be put to grind maize. Dawes declined to work. So they chained his hand to one arm of the grindstone, and placed another prisoner at the other arm. As the second prisoner turned, the hand of Dawes of course revolved.

"You're not such a pebble as folks seemed to think," grinned Frere, pointing to the turning wheel.

Upon which the indomitable poor devil straightened his sorely-tried muscles, and prevented the wheel from turning at all. Frere gave him fifty more lashes, and sent him the next day to grind cayenne pepper. This was a punishment more dreaded by the convicts than any other. The pungent dust filled their eyes and lungs, causing them the most excruciating torments. For a man with a raw back the work was one continued agony. In four days, Rufus Dawes, emaciated, blistered, blinded, broke down.

"For God's sake, Captain Frere, kill me at once!" he said.

"No fear," said the other, rejoiced at this proof of his power. "You've given in; that's all I wanted. Troke, take him to the hospital."

When he was in hospital, North visited him.

"I would have come to see you before," said the clergyman, "but I have been very ill."

In truth he looked so. He had had a fever, it seemed, and they had shaved his beard, and cropped his hair. Dawes could see that the haggard, wasted man had passed through some agony almost as great as his own. The next day Frere visited him, complimented him on his courage, and offered to make him a constable. Dawes turned his scarred back to his torturer, and resolutely declined to answer.

"I am afraid you have made an enemy of the Commandant," said North, the next day. "Why not accept his offer?"

Dawes cast on him a glance of quiet scorn. "And betray my mates? I'm not one of that sort."

The clergyman spoke to him of hope, of release, of repentance, and redemption. The prisoner laughed. "Who's to redeem me?" he said, expressing his thoughts in phraseology that to ordinary folks might seem blasphemous. "It would take a Christ to die again to save such as I."

North spoke to him of immortality. "There is another life," said he. "Do not risk your chance of happiness in it. You have a future to live for, man."

"I hope not," said the victim of the "system." "I want to rest—to rest, and never to be disturbed again."

His "spirit" was broken enough by this time. Yet he had resolution enough to refuse Frere's repeated offers. "I'll never 'jump' it," he said to North, "if they cut me in half first."

North pityingly implored the stubborn mind to have mercy on the lacerated body, but without effect. His own wayward heart gave him the key to read the cipher of this man's life. "A noble nature ruined," said he to himself. "What is the secret of his history?"

Dawes, on his part, seeing how different from other black coats was this priest—at once so ardent and so gloomy, so stern and so tender—began to speculate on the cause of his monitor's sunken cheeks, fiery eyes, and pre-occupied manner, to wonder what grief inspired those agonized prayers, those eloquent and daring supplications, which were daily poured out over his rude bed. So between

these two—the priest and the sinner—was a sort of sympathetic bond.

One day this bond was drawn so close as to tug at both their heart-strings. The chaplain had a flower in his coat. Dawes eyed it with hungry looks, and, as the clergyman was about to quit the room, said, “Mr. North, will you give me that rosebud?” North paused irresolutely, and finally, as if after a struggle with himself, took it carefully from his button-hole, and placed it in the prisoner’s brown, scarred hand. In another instant, Dawes, believing himself alone, pressed the gift to his lips. North returned abruptly, and the eyes of the pair met. Dawes flushed crimson, but North turned white as death. Neither spoke, but each was drawn closer to the other, since both had kissed the rosebud plucked by Sylvia’s fingers.



CHAPTER VIII.

EXTRACTED FROM THE DIARY OF THE REV.
JAMES NORTH.

OCTOBER 21st.—I am safe for another six months if I am careful, for my last bout lasted longer than I expected. I suppose one of these days I shall have a paroxysm that will kill me. I shall not regret it.

I wonder if this familiar of mine—I begin to detest the expression—will accuse me of endeavouring to make a case for myself if I say that I believe my madness to be a disease? I do believe it. I honestly can no more help getting drunk, than a lunatic can help screaming and gibbering. It would be different with me, perhaps, were I a contented man, happily married, with children about me, and family

cares to distract me. But as I am—a lonely, gloomy being, debarred from love, devoured by spleen, and tortured with repressed desires—I become a living torment to myself. I think of happier men, with fair wives and clinging children, of men who are loved and who love, of Frere for instance—and a hideous wild beast seems to stir within me, a monster, whose cravings cannot be satisfied, can only be drowned in stupefying brandy.

Penitent and shattered, I vow to lead a new life; to forswear spirits, to drink nothing but water. Indeed, the sight and smell of brandy make me ill. All goes well for some weeks, when I grow nervous, discontented, moody. I smoke, and am soothed. But moderation is not to be thought of; little by little I increase the dose of tobacco. Five pipes a day become six or seven. Then I count up to ten and twelve, then drop to three or four, then mount to eleven at a leap; then lose count altogether. Much smoking excites the brain. I feel clear, bright, gay. My tongue is parched in the morning, however, and I use liquor to literally “moisten my clay.” I drink wine or beer in moderation, and all goes well. My limbs regain their suppleness, my hands their coolness, my brain its

placidity. I begin to feel that I have a will. I am confident, calm, and hopeful. To this condition succeeds one of the most frightful melancholy. I remain plunged, for an hour together, in a stupor of despair. The earth, air, sea, all appear barren, colourless. Life is a burden. I long to sleep, and sleeping struggle to awake, because of the awful dreams which flap about me in the darkness. At night I cry "Would to God it were morning!" in the morning, "Would to God it were evening!" I loathe myself, and all around me. I am nerveless, passionless, bowed down with a burden like the burden of Saul. I know well what will restore me to life and ease—restore me, but to cast me back again into a deeper fit of despair. I drink. One glass—my blood is warmed,—my heart leaps, my hand no longer shakes. Three glasses, I rise with hope in my soul,—the evil spirit flies from me. I continue—pleasing images flock to my brain, the fields break into flower, the birds into song, the sea gleams sapphire, the warm heaven laughs. Great God! what man could withstand a temptation like this?

By an effort, I shake off the desire to drink deeper, and fixing my thoughts on my duties,

on my books, on the wretched prisoners. I succeed perhaps for a time ; but my blood, heated by the wine which is at once my poison and my life, boils in my veins. I drink again, and dream. I feel all the animal within me stirring. In the day my thoughts wander to all monstrous imaginings. The most familiar objects suggest to me loathsome thoughts. Obscene and filthy images surround me. My nature seems changed. By day I feel myself a wolf in sheep's clothing ; a man possessed by a devil, who is ready at any moment to break out and tear him to pieces. At night I become a satyr. While in this torment I at once hate and fear myself. One fair face is ever before me, gleaming through my hot dreams like a flying moon in the sultry midnight of a tropic storm. I dare not trust myself in the presence of those whom I love and respect, lest my wild thoughts should find vent in wilder words. I lose my humanity. I am a beast. Out of this depth there is but one way of escape. Downwards. I must drench the monster I have awakened until he sleeps again. I drink and become oblivious. In these last paroxysms there is nothing for me but brandy. I shut myself up alone and pour down my gullet huge draughts of spirit.

It mounts to my brain. I am a man again ! and as I regain my manhood, I topple over—dead drunk.

But the awakening ! Let me not paint it. The delirium, the fever, the self-loathing, the prostration, the despair. I view in the looking-glass a haggard face, with red eyes. I look down upon shaking hands, flaccid muscles, and shrunken limbs. I speculate if I shall ever be one of those grotesque and melancholy beings, with bleared eyes and running noses, swollen bellies and shrunken legs ! Ugh !—it is too likely.

October 22nd.—Have spent the day with Mrs. Frere. She is evidently eager to leave the place—as eager as I am. Frere rejoices in his murderous power, and laughs at her expostulations. I suppose men get tired of their wives. In my present frame of mind I am at a loss to understand how a man could refuse a wife anything.

I do not think she can possibly care for him. I am not a selfish sentimentalist, as are the majority of seducers. I would take no woman away from a husband for mere liking. Yet I think there are cases in which a man *who loved* would be justified in making a

woman happy at the risk of his own—soul, I suppose.

Making her happy! Ay, that's the point. Would she be happy? There are few men who can endure to be "cut," slighted, pointed at, and women suffer more than men in these regards. I, a grizzled man of forty, am not such an arrant ass as to suppose that a year of guilty delirium can compensate to a gently-nurtured woman for the loss of that social dignity which constitutes her best happiness. I am not such an idiot as to forget that there may come a time when the woman I love may cease to love *me*, and having no tie of self-respect, social position, or family duty, to bind her, may inflict upon her seducer that agony which he has taught her to inflict upon her husband. Apart from the question of the sin of breaking the seventh commandment, I doubt if the worst husband and the most unhappy home are not better, in this social condition of ours, than the most devoted lover. A strange subject this for a clergyman to speculate upon! If this diary should ever fall into the hands of a real God-fearing, honest booby, who never was tempted to sin, by finding that at middle-age he loved the wife of another, how he would condemn me! And rightly, of course.

November 4th.—In one of the turnkey's rooms in the new gaol is to be seen an article of harness, which at first sight creates surprise in the mind of the beholder, who considers what animal of the brute creation exists of so diminutive a size as to admit of its use. On inquiry, it will be found to be a bridle, perfect in headband, throat-lash, etc., for a human being. There is attached to this bridle a round piece of cross wood, of almost four inches in length, and one and a half in diameter. This, again, is secured to a broad strap of leather to cross the mouth. In the wood there is a small hole, and when used, the wood is inserted in the mouth, the small hole being the only breathing space. This being secured with the various straps and buckles, a more complete bridle could not be well imagined.

I was in the gaol last evening at eight o'clock. I had been to see Rufus Dawes, and returning, paused for a moment to speak to Hailey. Gimblett, who robbed Mr. Vane of two hundred pounds, was present; he was at that time a turnkey, holding a third-class pass, and in receipt of two shillings per diem. Everything was quite still. I could not help remarking how quiet the gaol was, when Gimblett said, "There's some one speaking. I know

who that is." And forthwith took from its pegs one of the bridles just described, and a pair of handcuffs.

I followed him to one of the cells, which he opened, and therein was a man lying on his straw mat, undressed, and to all appearance fast asleep. Gimblett ordered him to get up and dress himself. He did so, and came into the yard, where Gimblett inserted the iron-wood gag in his mouth. The sound produced by his breathing through it (which appeared to be done with great difficulty) resembled a low, indistinct whistle. Gimblett led him to the lamp-post in the yard, and I saw that the victim of his wanton tyranny was the poor blind wretch Mooney. Gimblett placed him with his back against the lamp-post, and his arms being taken round, were secured by handcuffs round the post. I was told that the old man was to remain in this condition for three hours. I went at once to the Commandant. He invited me into his drawing-room—an invitation which I had the good sense to refuse—but refused to listen to any plea for mercy. "The old impostor is always making his blindness an excuse for disobedience," said he.—And this is *her* husband!



CHAPTER IX.

THE LONGEST STRAW.

RUFUS DAWES hearing, when "on the chain" the next day, of the wanton torture of his friend, uttered no threat of vengeance, but groaned only. "I am not so strong as I was," said he, as if in apology for his lack of spirit. "They have unnerved me." And he looked sadly down at his gaunt frame and trembling hands.

"I can't stand it no longer," said Mooney, grimly. "I've spoken to Bland, and he's of my mind. You know what we resolved to do. Let's do it."

Rufus Dawes stared at the sightless orbs turned inquiringly to his own. The fingers

of his hand, thrust into his bosom, felt a token which lay there. A shudder thrilled him. "No, no. Not now," he said.

"You're not afeard, man?" asked Mooney, stretching out his hand in the direction of the voice. "You're not going to shirk?" The other avoided the touch, and shrank away, still staring. "You ain't going to back out after you swore it, Dawes? You're not that sort. Dawes, speak, man!"

"Is Bland willing?" asked Dawes, looking round, as if to seek some method of escape from the glare of those unspeculative eyes.

"Ay, and ready. They flogged him again yesterday."

"Leave it till to-morrow," said Dawes, at length.

"No; let's have it over," urged the old man, with a strange eagerness. "I'm tired o' this."

Rufus Dawes cast a wistful glance towards the wall behind which lay the house of the Commandant. "Leave it till to-morrow," he repeated, with his hand still in his breast.

• They had been so occupied in their conversation that neither had observed the approach of their common enemy. "What are you hiding there?" cried Frere, seizing Dawes by

the wrist. "More tobacco, you dog?" The hand of the convict, thus suddenly plucked from his bosom, opened involuntarily, and a withered rose fell to the earth. Frere at once, indignant and astonished, picked it up. "Hallo! What the devil's this? You've not been robbing my garden for a nosegay, Jack?" The Commandant was wont to call all convicts "Jack" in his moments of facetiousness. It was a little humorous way he had.

Rufus Dawes uttered one dismal cry, and then stood trembling and cowed. His companions, hearing the exclamation of rage and grief that burst from him, looked to see him snatch back the flower or perform some act of violence. Perhaps such was his intention, but he did not execute it. One would have thought that there was some charm about this rose so strangely cherished, for he stood gazing at it, as it twirled between Captain Frere's strong fingers, as though it fascinated him. "You're a pretty man to want a rose for your button-hole! Are you going out with your sweetheart next Sunday, Mr. Dawes?" The gang laughed. "How did you get this?" Dawes was silent. "You'd better tell me." No answer. "Troke, let us see if we can't find Mr. Dawes's tongue. Pull off your shirt,

my man. I expect that's the way to your heart—eh, boys?"

At this elegant allusion to the lash, the gang laughed again, and looked at each other astonished. It seemed possible that the leader of the Ring was going to turn milksop. Such, indeed, appeared to be the case, for Dawes, trembling and pale, cried, "Don't flog me again, sir! I picked it up in the yard. It fell out of your coat one day." Frere smiled with an inward satisfaction at the result of his spirit-breaking. The explanation was probably the correct one. He was in the habit of wearing flowers in his coat, and it was impossible that the convict should have obtained one by any other means. Had it been a fig of tobacco now, the astute Commandant knew plenty of men who would have brought it into the prison. But who would risk a flogging for so useless a thing as a flower? "You'd better not pick up any more, Jack," he said. "We don't grow flowers for your amusement." And contemptuously flinging the rose over the wall, he strode away.

The gang, left to itself for a moment, bestowed their attention upon Dawes. Large tears were silently rolling down his face, and he stood staring at the wall as one in a

dream. The gang curled their lips. One fellow, more charitable than the rest, tapped his forehead and winked. "He's going cranky," said this good-natured man, who could not understand what a sane prisoner had to do with flowers. Dawes recovered himself, and the contemptuous glances of his companions seemed to bring back the colour to his cheeks.

"We'll do it to-night," whispered he to Mooney, and Mooney smiled with pleasure.

Since the "tobacco trick," Mooney and Dawes had been placed in the new prison, together with a man named Bland, who had already twice failed to kill himself. When old Mooney, fresh from the torture of the gag-and-bridle, lamented his hard case, Bland proposed that the three should put in practice a scheme in which two at least must succeed. The scheme was a desperate one, and attempted only in the last extremity. It was the custom of the Ring, however, to swear each of its members to carry out to the best of his ability this last invention of the convict-disciplined mind, should two other members crave his assistance.

The scheme—like all great ideas—was *simplicity* itself.

That evening, when the cell-door was securely locked, and the absence of a visiting gaoler might be counted upon for an hour at least, Bland produced a straw, and held it out to his companions. Dawes took it, and tearing it into unequal lengths, handed the fragments to Mooney.

"The longest is the one," said the blind man. "Come on, boys, and dip in the lucky-bag!"

It was evident that lots were to be drawn to determine to whom fortune would grant freedom. The men drew in silence, and then Bland and Dawes looked at each other. The prize had been left in the bag. Mooney—fortunate old fellow—retained the longest straw. Bland's hand shook as he compared notes with his companion. There was a moment's pause, during which the blank eyeballs of the blind man fiercely searched the gloom, as if in that awful moment they could penetrate it.

"I hold the shortest," said Dawes to Bland. "'Tis you that must do it."

"I'm glad of that," said Mooney.

Bland, seemingly terrified at the danger which fate had decreed that he should run, tore the fatal lot into fragments with an oath,

and sat gnawing his knuckles in excess of abject terror. Mooney stretched himself out upon his plank-bed. "Come on, mate," he said.

Bland extended a shaking hand, and caught Rufus Dawes by the sleeve.

"You have more nerve than I. You do it."

"No, no," said Dawes, almost as pale as his companion. "I've run my chance fairly. 'Twas your own proposal."

The coward who, confident in his own luck, would seem to have fallen into the pit he had dug for others, sat rocking himself to and fro, holding his head in his hands.

"By Heaven, I can't do it," he whispered, lifting a white, wet face.

"What are you waiting for?" said fortunate Mooney. "Come on, I'm ready."

"I—I—thought you might like to—to—pray a bit," said Bland.

The notion seemed to sober the senses of the old man, exalted too fiercely by his good fortune.

"Ay!" he said. "Pray! A good thought!" and he knelt down; and shutting his blind eyes—'twas as though he was dazzled by some strong light—unseen by his comrades, moved his lips silently.

The silence was at last broken by the footstep of the warder in the corridor. Bland hailed it as a reprieve from whatever act of daring he dreaded.

"We must wait until he goes," he whispered eagerly. "He might look in."

Dawes nodded, and Mooney, whose quick ear apprised him very exactly of the position of the approaching gaoler, rose from his knees radiant. The sour face of Gimblett appeared at the trap of the cell-door.

"All right?" he asked, somewhat—so the three thought—less sourly than usual.

"All right," was the reply, and Mooney added, "Good-night, Mr. Gimblett."

"I wonder what makes the old man so cheerful," thought Gimblett, as he got into the next corridor.

The sound of his echoing footsteps had scarcely died away, when upon the ears of the two less fortunate casters of lots, fell the dull sound of rending woollen. The lucky man was tearing a strip from his blanket. "I think this will do," said he, pulling it between his hands to test its strength. "I am an old man." It was possible that he debated concerning the descent of some abyss into which the strip of blanket was to lower

him. "Here, Bland, catch hold. Where are ye?—don't be faint-hearted, man. It won't take ye long."

It was quite dark now in the cell, but as Bland advanced, his face was like a white mask floating upon the darkness, it was so ghastly pale. Dawes pressed his lucky comrade's hand, and withdrew to the farthest corner. Bland and Mooney were for a few moments, occupied with the rope—doubtless preparing for escape by means of it. The silence was broken only by the convulsive jangling of Bland's irons—he was shuddering violently. At last Mooney spoke again, in strangely soft and subdued tones.

"Dawes, lad, do you think there is a Heaven?"

"I know there is a Hell," said Dawes, without turning his face.

"Ay, and a Heaven, lad. I think I shall go there. *You* will, old chap, for you've been good to me—God bless you, you've been very good to me."

* * * *

When Troke came in the morning, he saw what had occurred at a glance, and hastened to remove the corpse of the strangled *Mooney*.

“We drew lots,” said Rufus Dawes, pointing to Bland, who crouched in the corner farthest from his victim, “and it fell upon him to do it. I’m the witness.”

“They’ll hang you for all that,” said Troke.

“I hope so,” said Rufus Dawes.

The scheme of escape hit upon by the convict intellect was simply this. Three men being together, lots were drawn to determine whom should be murdered. The drawer of the longest straw was the “lucky” man. He was killed. The drawer of the next longest straw was the murderer. He was hanged. The unlucky one was the witness. He had, of course, an excellent chance of being hung also, but his doom was not so certain, and he therefore looked upon himself as unfortunate.



CHAPTER X.

A MEETING.

JOHAN REX found the George disagreeably prepared for his august arrival. Obsequious waiters took his dressing-bag and overcoat, the landlord himself welcomed him at the door. Two naval gentlemen came out of the coffee-room to stare at him. "Have you any more luggage, Mr. Devine?" asked the landlord, as he flung open the door of the best drawing-room. It was awkwardly evident that his wife had no notion of suffering him to hide his borrowed light under a bushel.

A supper-table laid for two people gleamed bright from the cheeriest corner. A fire crackled beneath the marble mantelshelf.

The latest evening paper lay upon a chair; and, brushing it carelessly with her costly dress, the woman he had so basely deserted came smiling to meet him.

“Well, Mr. Richard Devine,” said she, “you did not expect to see me again, did you?”

Although, on his journey down, he had composed an elaborate speech wherewith to greet her, this unnatural civility dumbfounded him. “Sarah! I never meant to——”

“Hush, my dear Richard—it must be Richard now, I suppose—This is not the time for explanations. Besides, the waiter might hear you. Let us have some supper, you must be hungry I am sure.” He advanced to the table mechanically. “How fat you are!” she continued. “Too good living, I suppose. You were not so fat at Port Ar—— Oh, I forgot, my dear! Come and sit down. That’s right. I have told them all that I am your wife, for whom you have sent. They regard me with some interest and respect in consequence. Don’t spoil their good opinion of me.”

He was about to utter an imprecation, but she stopped him by a glance. “No bad language, John, or I shall ring for a constable

Let us understand one another, my dear. You may be a very great man to other people, but to me you are merely my runaway husband—an escaped convict. If you don't eat your supper civilly, I shall send for the police."

"Sarah!" he burst out, "I never meant to desert you. Upon my word. It is all a mistake. Let me explain."

"There is no need for explanations yet, Jack—I mean Richard. Have your supper. Ah! I know what you want."

She poured out half a tumbler of brandy, and gave it to him. He took the glass from her hand, drank the contents, and then, as though warmed by the spirit, laughed. "What a woman you are, Sarah. I have been a great brute, I confess."

"You have been an ungrateful villain," said she, with sudden passion, "a hardened, selfish, villain."

"But, Sarah——"

"Don't touch me!"

"'Pon my word, you are a fine creature, and I was a fool to leave you."

The compliment seemed to soothe her, for her tone changed somewhat. "It was a wicked, cruel act, Jack. You whom I saved

from death—whom I nursed—whom I enriched. It was the act of a coward.”

“I admit it. It was.”

“You admit it. Have you no shame then? Have you no pity for me for what I have suffered all these years?”

“I don’t suppose you cared much.”

“Don’t you? You never thought about me at all. I have cared this much, John Rex—bah! the door is shut close enough—that I have spent a fortune in hunting you down; and now I have found you, I will make you suffer in your turn.”

He laughed again, but uneasily. “How did you discover me?”

With a readiness which showed that she had already prepared an answer to the question, she unlocked a writing case which was on the side table, and took from it a newspaper. “By one of those accidents which are the ruin of men like you. Among the papers sent to the overseer from his English friends was this one.”

She held out an illustrated journal—a Sunday organ of sporting opinion—and pointed to a portrait engraved on the centre page. It represented a broad-shouldered, bearded man, dressed in the fashion affected

by turfites and lovers of horseflesh, standing beside a pedestal on which were piled a variety of racing cups and trophies. John Rex read underneath this work of art the name

M R. R I C H A R D D E V I N E,

THE LEVIATHAN OF THE TURF.

“And you recognized me?”

“The portrait was sufficiently like you to induce me to make inquiries, and when I found that Mr. Richard Devine had suddenly returned from a mysterious absence of fourteen years, I set to work in earnest. I have spent a deal of money, Jack, but I’ve got you!”

“You have been clever in finding me out; I give you credit for that.”

“There is not a single act of your life, John Rex, that I do not know,” she continued, with heat. “I have traced you from the day you stole out of my house until now. I know your continental trips, your journeyings here and there in search of a lost clue. I pieced together the puzzle, as you have done, and I know that, by some foul fortune, you have stolen the secret of a dead man to ruin an innocent and virtuous family.”

“Hullo! hullo!” said John Rex. “Since when have *you* learnt to talk of virtue?”

“It is well to taunt, but you have got to the end of your tether now, Jack. I have communicated with the woman whose son’s fortune you have stolen. I expect to hear from Lady Devine in a day or so.”

“Well—and when you hear?”

“I shall give back the fortune at the price of her silence!”

“Ho! ho! Will you?”

“Yes; and if my husband does not come back and live with me quietly, I shall call in the police.”

John Rex sprang up. “Who will believe you, you idiot?” he cried. “I’ll have you sent to gaol as an impostor.”

“You forget, my dear,” she returned, playing coquettishly with her rings, and glancing sideways as she spoke, “that you have already acknowledged me as your wife before the landlord and the servants. It is too late for *that* sort of thing. Oh, my dear Jack, you think you are very clever, but I am as clever as you.”

Smothering a curse, he sat down beside her. “Listen, Sarah. What is the use of fighting like a couple of children. I am rich——”

.

“So am I.”

“Well, so much the better. We will join our riches together. I admit that I was a fool and a cur to leave you ; but I played for a great stake. The name of Richard Devine was worth nearly half a million of money. It is mine. I won it. Share it with me! Sarah, you and I defied the world years ago. Don’t let us quarrel now. I was ungrateful. Forget it. We know by this time that we are not either of us angels. We started in life together—do you remember, Sally, when I met you first?—determined to make money. We have succeeded. Why then set to work to destroy each other? You are handsome as ever, I have not lost my wits. Is there any need for you to tell the world that I am a runaway convict, and that you are—well no, of course, there is no need. Kiss, and be friends, Sarah. I would have escaped you if I could, I admit. You have found me out. I accept the position. You claim me as your husband. You say you are Mrs. Richard Devine. Very well, I admit it. You have all your life wanted to be a great lady. Now is your chance!”

Much as she had cause to hate him, well as she knew his treacherous and ungrateful

character, little as she had reason to trust him, her strange and distempered affection for the scoundrel came upon her again with gathering strength. As she sat beside him, listening to the familiar tones of the voice she had learned to love, greedily drinking in the promise of a future fidelity which she was well aware was made but to be broken, her memory recalled the past days of trust and happiness, and her woman's fancy once more invested the selfish villain she had reclaimed with those attributes which had enchained her wilful and wayward affections. The unselfish devotion which had marked her conduct to the swindler and convict was, indeed, her one redeeming virtue ; and perhaps she felt dimly — poor woman—that it were better for her to cling to that, if she lost all the world beside. Her wish for vengeance melted under the influence of these thoughts. The bitterness of despised love, the shame and anger of desertion, ingratitude, and betrayal, all vanished. The tears of a sweet forgiveness trembled in her eyes, the unreasoning love of her sex—faithful to nought but love, and faithful to love in death—shook in her voice. She took his coward hand and kissed it, pardoning all his baseness with the sole reproach, “ Oh

John, John, you might have trusted me after all ?”

John Rex had conquered, and he smiled as he embraced her. “I wish I had,” said he ; “it would have saved me many regrets ; but never mind. Sit down ; *now* we will have supper.”

“Your preference has one drawback, Sarah,” he said, when the meal was concluded, and the two sat down to consider their immediate course of action, “it doubles the chance of detection.”

“How so?”

“People have accepted me without inquiry, but I am afraid not without dislike. Mr. Francis Wade, my uncle, never liked me ; and I fear I have not played my cards well with Lady Devine. When they find I have a mysterious wife their dislike will become suspicion. Is it likely that I should have been married all these years and not have informed them ?”

“Very unlikely,” returned Sarah calmly, “and that is just the reason why you have *not* been married all these years. “Really,” she added, with a laugh, “the male intellect *is* very dull. You have already told ten

thousand lies about this affair, and yet you don't see your way to tell one more."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, my dear Richard, you surely cannot have forgotten that you married me last year on the Continent? By the way, it *was* last year that you were there, was it not? I am the daughter of a poor clergyman of the Church of England; name—anything you please—and you met me—Where shall we say? Baden, Aix, Brussels? Cross the Alps, if you like, dear, and say Rome."

John Rex put his hand to his head. "Of course—I am stupid," said he. "I have not been well lately. Too much brandy and racket, I suppose."

"Well, we will alter all that," she returned with a laugh, which her anxious glance at him belied. "You are going to be domestic now, Jack—I mean Dick."

"Go on," said he, impatiently. "What then?"

"Then, having settled these little preliminaries, you take me up to London and introduce me to your relatives and friends."

He started. "A bold game."

"Bold! Nonsense! The only safe one. People don't, as a rule, suspect, unless one is

mysterious. You *must* do it; I have arranged for your doing it. The waiters here all know me as your wife. There is not the least danger—unless, indeed, you are married already?" she added, with a quick and angry suspicion.

"You need not be alarmed. I was not such a fool as to marry another woman while *you* were alive—had I even seen one I would have cared to marry. But what of Lady Devine? You say you have told her."

"I have told her to communicate with Mrs. Carr, Post-office, Torquay, in order to hear something to her advantage. If you had been rebellious, John, the 'something' would have been a letter from me telling her who you really are. Now you have proved obedient, the 'something' will be a begging letter of a sort of which she has already received hundreds, and which in all probability she will not even answer. What do you think of that, Mr. Richard Devine?"

"You deserve success, Sarah," said the old schemer, in genuine admiration. "By Jove, this is something like the old days, when we were Mr. and Mrs. Crofton."

"Or, Mr. and Mrs. Skinner, eh, John?" she said, with as much tenderness in her voice

as though she had been a virtuous matron recalling her honeymoon. "That was an unlucky name, wasn't it, dear? You should have taken my advice there." And, immersed in grateful recollection of their past rogueries, the worthy pair pensively smiled. Rex was the first to awake from that pleasant reverie.

"I will be guided by you then," he said. "What next?"

"Next—for, as you say, my presence doubles the danger—we will contrive to withdraw quietly from England. The introduction to your mother over, and Mr. Francis disposed of, we will go to Hampstead, and live there for a while. During that time you must turn into cash as much property as you dare. We will then go abroad for the 'season'—and stop there. After a year or so on the Continent, you can write to our agent to sell more property; and, finally, when we are regarded as permanent absentees—and three or four years will bring that about—we will get rid of everything, and slip over to America. Then you can endow a charity if you like, or build a church to the memory of the man you have displaced."

John Rex burst into a laugh. An excellent

plan. I like the idea of the charity—the Devine Hospital, eh?”

“By the way, how did you find out the particulars of this man’s life? He was burned in the *Hydaspes*, wasn’t he?”

“No,” said Rex, with an air of pride. “He was transported in the *Malabar* under the name of Rufus Dawes. You remember him. It is a long story. The particulars weren’t numerous, and if the old lady had been half sharp she would have bowled me out. But the fact was she *wanted* to find the fellow alive, and was willing to take a good deal on trust. I’ll tell you all about it another time. I think I’ll go to bed now; I’m tired, and my head aches as though it would split.”

“Then it is decided that you follow my directions?”

“Yes.”

She rose and placed her hand on the bell. “What are you going to do?” he asked uneasily.

“I am going to do nothing. *You* are going to telegraph to your servants to have the house in London prepared for your wife, who will return with you the day after to-morrow.”

John Rex stayed her hand with a sudden

angry gesture. "This is all devilish fine," he said, "but suppose it fails?"

"That is your affair, John. You need not go on with this business at all, unless you like. I had rather you didn't."

"What the deuce am I to do, then?"

"I am not as rich as you are, but, with my station and so on, I am worth seven thousand a year. Come back to Australia with me, and let these poor people enjoy their own again. Ah, John, it is the best thing to do, believe me. We can afford to be honest now."

"A fine scheme!" cried he. "Give up half a million of money, and go back to Australia! You must be mad!"

"Then telegraph."

"But, my dear——"

"Hush, here's the waiter."

As he wrote, John Rex felt gloomily that, though he had succeeded in recalling her affection, that affection was as imperious as of yore.



CHAPTER XI.

EXTRACTED FROM THE DIARY OF THE REV.
JAMES NORTH.

DECEMBER 7th.—I have made up my mind to leave this place, to bury myself again in the bush, I suppose, and await extinction. I try to think that the reason for this determination is the frightful condition of misery existing among the prisoners ; that because I am daily horrified and sickened by scenes of torture and infamy, I decide to go away ; that, feeling myself powerless to save others, I wish to spare myself. But in this journal, in which I bind myself to write nothing but truth, I am forced to confess that these are *not* the reasons. I will write the reason plainly : “ I covet my neighbour’s wife.” It does not look *well thus* written. It looks hideous. In my

own breast I find numberless excuses for my passion. I said to myself, "My neighbour does not love his wife, and her unloved life is misery. She is forced to live in the frightful seclusion of this accursed island, and she is dying for want of companionship. She feels that I understand and appreciate her, that I could love her as she deserves, that I could render her happy. I feel that I have met the only woman who has power to touch my heart, to hold me back from the ruin into which I am about to plunge, to make me useful to my fellows—a man, and not a drunkard." Whispering these conclusions to myself, I am urged to brave public opinion, and make two lives happy. I say to myself, or rather my desires say to me—"What sin is there in this? Adultery? No; for a marriage without love is the coarsest of all adulteries. What tie binds a man and woman together—that formula of license pronounced by the priest, which the law has recognized as a 'legal bond?' Surely not this only, for marriage is but a partnership—a contract of mutual fidelity—and in all contracts the violation of the terms of the agreement by one of the contracting persons absolves the other. Mrs. Frere is then absolved, by her husband's act. I cannot but think so. But is she willing to

risk the shame of divorce or legal offence? Perhaps. Is she fitted by temperament to bear such a burden of contumely as must needs fall upon her? Will she not feel disgust at the man who entrapped her into shame? Do not the comforts which surround her compensate for the lack of affection?" And so the torturing catechism continues, until I am driven mad with doubt, love, and despair.

Of course, I am wrong; of course I outrage my character as a priest; of course I endanger—according to the creed I teach—my soul and hers. But priests, unluckily, have hearts and passions as well as other men. Thank God, as yet, I have never expressed my madness in words. What a fate is mine! When I am in her presence I am in torment; when I am absent from her, my imagination pictures her surrounded by a thousand graces that are not hers, but belong to all the women of my dreams—to Helen, to Juliet, to Rosalind. Fools that we are of our own senses! When I think of her I blush; when I hear her name my heart leaps, and I grow pale. Love! What is the love of two pure souls, scarce conscious of the Paradise into which they have fallen, to this maddening delirium? I can understand the poison of Circe's cup; it *is the sweet-torment of a forbidden love like*

mine! Away gross materialism, in which I have so long schooled myself! I, who laughed at passion as the outcome of temperament and easy living—I, who thought, in my intellect, to sound all the depths and shoals of human feeling—I, who analyzed my own soul—scoffed at my own yearnings for an immortality—am forced to deify the senseless power of my creed, and believe in God, that I may pray to Him. I know now why men reject the cold impersonality that reason tells us rules the world—it is because they love. To die, and be no more; to die, and rendered into dust, be blown about the earth; to die, and leave our love defenceless and forlorn, till the bright soul that smiled to ours is smothered in the earth that made it! No! To love is life eternal. God, I believe in Thee! Aid me! Pity me! Sinful wretch that I am, to have denied Thee! See me on my knees before Thee! Pity me, or let me die!

December 9th.—I have been visiting the two condemned prisoners, Dawes and Bland, and praying with them. O Lord, let me save one soul that may plead with Thee for mine! Let me draw one being alive out of this pit! I weep—I weary Thee with my prayers, O Lord! Look down upon me. Grant me a

sign. Thou didst it in old times to men who were not more fervent in their supplications than am I. So says Thy Book. Thy Book which I believe—which I believe. Grant me a sign—one little sign, O Lord!—I will not see her. I have sworn it. Thou knowest my grief—my agony—my despair. Thou knowest why I love her. Thou knowest how I strive to make her hate me. Is that not a sacrifice? I am so lonely—a lonely man, with but one creature that he loves—yet, what is mortal love to Thee? Cruel and implacable, Thou sittest in the heavens men have built for Thee, and scornest them! Will not all the burnings and slaughters of the saints appease Thee? Art Thou not sated with blood and tears, O God of vengeance, of wrath, and of despair? Kind Christ, pity me. *Thou* wilt—for thou wast human! Blessed Saviour, at whose feet knelt the Magdalen! Divinity, who, most divine in Thy despair, called on Thy cruel God to save Thee—by the memory of that moment when Thou didst deem Thyself forsaken—forsake not me! Sweet Christ, have mercy on Thy sinful servant!

I can write no more. I will pray to Thee *with my lips*. I will shriek my supplications.

to Thee. I will call upon Thee so loud that all the world shall hear me, and wonder at Thy silence—unjust and unmerciful God!

December 14th.—What blasphemies are these which I have uttered in my despair? Horrible madness that has left me prostrate, to what heights of frenzy didst thou not drive my soul! Like him of old time, who wandered among the tombs, shrieking and tearing himself, I have been possessed by a devil. For a week I have been unconscious of aught save torture. I have gone about my daily duties as one who in his dreams repeats the accustomed action of the day, and knows it not. Men have looked at me strangely. They look at me strangely now. Can it be that my disease of drunkenness has become the disease of insanity? Am I mad, or do I but verge on madness? O Lord, whom in my agonies I have confessed, leave me my intellect—let me not become a drivelling spectacle for the curious to point at or to pity! At least, in mercy, spare me a little. Let not my punishment overtake me *here*. Let *her* memories of me be clouded with a sense of my rudeness or my brutality; let me for ever seem to her the ungrateful ruffian I strive to show myself—but let her not behold me—*that*!



CHAPTER XII.

THE STRANGE BEHAVIOUR OF MR. NORTH.

ON or about the 8th of December, Mrs. Frere noticed a sudden and unaccountable change in the manner of the chaplain. He came to her one afternoon, and, after talking for some time, in a vague and unconnected manner, about the miseries of the prison and the wretched condition of some of the prisoners, began to question her abruptly concerning Rufus Dawes.

“I do not wish to think of him,” said she, with a shudder. “I have the strangest, the most horrible dreams about him. He is a bad man. He tried to murder me when a child, and had it not been for my husband, he

would have done so. I have only seen him once since then—at Hobart Town, when he was taken.”

“He sometimes speaks to me of you,” said North, eyeing her. “He asked me once to give him a rose plucked in your garden.”

Sylvia turned pale. “And you gave it him?”

“Yes, I gave it him. Why not?”

“It was valueless, of course, but still—to a convict!”

“You are not angry?”

“Oh, no! Why should I be angry?” she laughed constrainedly. “It was a strange fancy for the man to have, that’s all.”

“I suppose you would not give me another rose, if I asked you.”

“Why not?” said she, turning away uneasily. “*You?* You are a gentleman.”

“Not I—you don’t know me.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that it would be better for you if you had never seen me.”

“Mr. North!” Terrified at the wild gleam in his eyes, she had risen hastily. “You are talking very strangely.”

“Oh, don’t be alarmed, Madam, I am not *drunk!*”—he pronounced the word with a

fierce energy. "I had better leave you. Indeed, I think the less we see of each other the better."

Deeply wounded and astonished at this extraordinary outburst, Sylvia allowed him to stride away without a word. She saw him pass through the garden and slam the little gate, but she did not see the agony on his face, or the passionate gesture with which—when out of eyeshot—he lamented the voluntary abasement of himself before her. She thought over his conduct with growing fear. It was not possible that he was intoxicated—such a vice was the last one of which she could have believed him guilty. It was more probable that some effects of the fever, which had recently confined him to his house, yet lingered. So she thought; and, thinking, was alarmed to realize of how much importance the well-being of this man was to her.

The next day he met her, and, bowing, passed swiftly. This pained her. Could she have offended him by some unlucky word? She made Maurice ask him to dinner, and, to her astonishment, he pleaded illness as an excuse for not coming. Her pride was hurt, and she sent him back his books and music. A curiosity that was unworthy of her com-

pelled her to ask the servant who carried the parcel what the clergyman had said. "He said nothing—only laughed." Laughed! In scorn of her foolishness! His conduct was ungentlemanly and intemperate. She would forget, as speedily as possible, that such a being had ever existed. This resolution taken, she was unusually patient with her husband.

So a week passed, and Mr. North did not return. Unluckily for the poor wretch, the very self-sacrifice he had made brought about the precise condition of things which he was desirous to avoid. It is possible that had the acquaintance between them continued on the same staid footing, it would have followed the lot of most acquaintanceships of the kind—other circumstances and other scenes might have wiped out the memory of all but common civilities between them, and Sylvia might never have discovered that she had for the chaplain any other feeling but that of esteem. But the very fact of the sudden wrenching away of her soul-companion, showed her how barren was the solitary life to which she had been fated. Her husband, she had long ago admitted, with bitter self-communings, was utterly unsuited to her.

She could find in his society no enjoyment, and for the sympathy which she needed was compelled to turn elsewhere. She understood that his love for her had burnt itself out—she confessed, with intensity of self-degradation, that his apparent affection had been born of sensuality, and had perished in the fires it had itself kindled. Many women have, unhappily, made some such discovery as this, but for most women there is some distracting occupation. Had it been Sylvia's fate to live in the midst of fashion and society, she would have found relief in the conversation of the witty, or the homage of the distinguished. Had fortune cast her lot in a city, Mrs. Frere might have become one of those charming women who collect around their supper-tables whatever of male intellect is obtainable, and who find the husband admirably useful to open his own champagne bottles. The celebrated women who have stepped out of their domestic circles to enchant or astonish the world, have almost invariably been cursed with unhappy homes. But poor Sylvia was not destined to this fortune. Cast back upon herself, she found no surcease of pain in her own imaginings, and meeting with a man sufficiently her elder to encourage her to talk,

and sufficiently clever to induce her to seek his society and his advice, she learnt, for the first time, to forget her own griefs; for the first time she suffered her nature to expand under the sun of a congenial influence. This sun, suddenly withdrawn, her soul, grown accustomed to the warmth and light, shivered at the gloom, and she looked about her in dismay at the dull and barren prospect of life which lay before her. In a word, she found that the society of North had become so far necessary to her, that to be deprived of it was a grief—notwithstanding that her husband remained to console her.

After a week of such reflections, the barrenness of life grew insupportable to her, and one day she came to Maurice and begged to be sent back to Hobart Town. “I cannot live in this horrible island,” she said. “I am getting ill. Let me go to my father for a few months, Maurice.” Maurice consented. His wife *was* looking ill, and Major Vickers was an old man—a rich old man—who loved his only daughter. It was not undesirable that Mrs. Frere should visit her father; indeed, so little sympathy was there between the pair, that, the first astonishment over, Maurice felt rather glad to get rid of her for a while. “You

can go back in the *Lady Franklin*, if you like, my dear," he said. "I expect her every day." At this decision—much to his surprise—she kissed him with more show of affection than she had manifested since the death of her child.

The news of the approaching departure became known, but still North did not make his appearance. Had it not been a step beneath the dignity of a woman, Mrs. Frere would have gone herself and asked him the meaning of his unaccountable rudeness, but there was just sufficient morbidity in the sympathy she had for him to restrain her from an act which a young girl—though not more innocent—would have dared without hesitation. Calling one day upon the wife of the surgeon, however, she met the chaplain face to face, and with the consummate art of acting which most women possess, rallied him upon his absence from her house. The behaviour of the poor devil, thus stabbed to the heart, was curious. He forgot gentlemanly behaviour and the respect due to a woman, flung one despairingly angry glance at her, and abruptly retired. Sylvia flushed crimson, and endeavoured to excuse North on account of his recent illness. The surgeon's wife looked askance, and turned

the conversation. The next time Sylvia bowed to this lady, she got a chilling salute in return that made her blood boil. "I wonder how I have offended Mrs. Field?" she asked Maurice. "She almost cut me to-day." "Oh, the old cat!" returned Maurice. "What does it matter if she did?" However, a few days afterwards, it seemed that it did matter; for Maurice called upon Field and conversed seriously with him. The issue of the conversation being reported to Mrs. Frere, the lady wept indignant tears of wounded pride and shame. It appeared that North had watched her out of the house, returned, and related—in a "stumbling, hesitating way," Mrs. Field said—how he disliked Mrs. Frere, how he did not want to visit her, and how flighty and reprehensible such conduct was in a married woman of her rank and station. This act of baseness—or profound nobleness—achieved its purpose. Sylvia noticed the unhappy priest no more.

Between the Commandant and the chaplain now arose a coolness, and Frere set himself, by various petty tyrannies, to disgust North, and compel him to a resignation of his office. The convict-gaolers speedily marked the difference in the treatment of the chaplain,

and their demeanour changed. For respect was substituted insolence ; for alacrity, sullenness ; for prompt obedience, impertinent intrusion. The men whom North favoured were selected as special subjects for harshness, and, for a prisoner to be seen talking to the clergyman, was sufficient to ensure for him a series of tyrannies. The result of this was, that North saw the souls he laboured to save slipping back into the gulf ; beheld the men he had half won to love him meet him with averted faces ; discovered that to show interest in a prisoner was to injure him, not to serve him. The unhappy man grew thinner and paler under this ingenious torment. He had deprived himself of that love which, guilty though it might be, was, nevertheless, the only true love he had known ; and he found that, having won this victory, he had gained the hatred of all living creatures with whom he came in contact. The authority of the Commandant was so supreme that men lived but by the breath of his nostrils. To offend him was to perish, and the man whom the Commandant hated must be hated also by all those who wished to exist in peace. There was but one being who was not to be turned from his alle-

giance—the convict murderer, Rufus Dawes, who awaited death. For many days he had remained mute, broken down beneath his weight of sorrow or of sullenness ; but North, bereft of other love and sympathy, strove with that fighting soul, if haply he might win it back to peace. It seemed to the fancy of the priest—a fancy distempered, perhaps, by excess, or superhumanly exalted by mental agony—that this convict, over whom he had wept, was given to him as a hostage for his own salvation. “I must save him or perish,” he said. “I must save him, though I redeem him with my own blood.”

Frere, unable to comprehend the reason of the calmness with which the doomed felon met his taunts and torments, thought that he was shamming piety to gain some indulgence of meat and drink, and redoubled his severity. He ordered Dawes to be taken out to work just before the hour at which the chaplain was accustomed to visit him. He pretended that the man was “dangerous,” and directed a gaoler to be present at all interviews, “lest the chaplain might be murdered.” He issued an order that all civil officers should obey the challenges of convicts acting as watchmen ; and North, coming to pray with his

penitent, would be stopped ten times by grinning felons, who, putting their faces within a foot of his, would roar out, "Who goes there?" and burst out laughing at the reply. Under pretence of watching more carefully over the property of the chaplain, he directed that any convict, acting as constable, might at any time "search everywhere and anywhere," for property supposed to be in the possession of a prisoner. The chaplain's servant was a prisoner, of course; and North's drawers were ransacked twice in one week by Troke. North met these impertinences with unruffled brow, and Frere could in no way account for his obstinacy, until the arrival of the *Lady Franklin* explained the chaplain's apparent coolness. He had sent in his resignation two months before, and the saintly Meekin had been appointed in his stead. Frere, unable to attack the clergyman, and indignant at the manner in which he had been defeated, revenged himself upon Rufus Dawes.



CHAPTER XIII.

MR. NORTH SPEAKS.

THE method and manner of Frere's revenge became a subject of whispered conversation on the island. It was reported that North had been forbidden to visit the convict, but that he had refused to accept the prohibition, and, by a threat of what he would do when the returning vessel had landed him in Hobart Town, had compelled the Commandant to withdraw his order. The Commandant, however, speedily discovered in Rufus Dawes signs of insubordination, and set to work again to reduce again still further the "spirit" he had so ingeniously "broken." The unhappy convict was deprived of food, was kept awake at

nights, was put to the hardest labour, was loaded with the heaviest irons. Troke, with devilish malice, suggested that, if the tortured wretch would decline to see the chaplain, some amelioration of his condition might be effected; but his suggestions were in vain. Fully believing that his death was certain, Dawes clung to North as the saviour of his agonized soul, and rejected all such insidious overtures. Enraged at this obstinacy, Frere sentenced his victim to the "spread eagle" and the "stretcher."

Now the rumour of the obduracy of this undaunted convict who had been recalled to her by the clergyman at their strange interview, had reached Sylvia's ears. She had heard gloomy hints of the punishments inflicted on him by her husband's order; and as—constantly revolving in her mind that last conversation with the chaplain—she wondered at the prisoner's strange fancy for a flower, her brain began to thrill with those undefined and dreadful memories which had haunted her childhood. What was the link between her and this murderous villain? How came it that she felt at times so strange a sympathy for his fate, and that he—who had attempted her

life—cherished so tender a remembrance of her as to beg for a flower which her hand had touched.

She questioned her husband concerning the convict's misdoings, but with the petulant brutality which he invariably displayed when the name of Rufus Dawes intruded itself into their conversation, Maurice Frere harshly refused to satisfy her. This but raised her curiosity higher. She reflected how bitter he had always seemed against this man—she remembered how, in the garden at Port Arthur, the hunted wretch had caught her dress with words of assured confidence—she recollected the fragment of cloth he had passionately flung from him, and which her affianced lover had contemptuously tossed into the stream. The name of "Dawes," detested as it had become to her, bore yet same strange association of comfort and hope. What secret lurked behind the twilight that had fallen upon her childish memories? Deprived of the advice of North—to whom, a few weeks back, she would have confided her misgivings—she resolved upon a project that, for her, was most distasteful. She would herself visit the jail and judge how far the rumours of her husband's cruelty were worthy of credit.

One sultry afternoon, when the Commandant had gone on a visit of inspection, Troke, lounging at the door of the New Prison, beheld, with surprise, the figure of the Commandant's lady.

"What is it, mam?" he asked, scarcely able to believe his eyes.

"I want to see the prisoner Dawes."

Troke's jaw fell.

"See Dawes?" he repeated.

"Yes. Where is he?"

Troke was preparing a lie. The imperious voice, and the clear, steady gaze, confused him.

"He's here."

"Let me see him."

"He's—he's under punishment, mam."

"What do you mean? Are they flogging him?"

"No; but—but he's dangerous, mam. The Commandant——"

"Do you mean to open the door or not, Mr. Troke?"

Troke grew more confused. It was evident that he was most unwilling to open the door. "The Commandant gave strict orders——"

"Do you wish me to *complain* to the Commandant?" cries Sylvia, with a touch of her

old spirit, and jumping hastily at the conclusion that the gaolers were, perhaps, torturing the convict for their own entertainment. "Open the door at once!—at once!"

Thus commanded, Troke, with a hasty growl of its "being no affair of his, and he hoped Mrs. Frere would tell the captain how it happened," flung open the door of a cell on the right hand of the doorway. It was so dark that, at first, Sylvia could distinguish nothing but the outline of a framework, with something stretched upon it that resembled a human body. Her first thought was that the man was dead, but this was not so—he groaned. Her eyes, accustoming themselves to the gloom, began to see what the "punishment" was. Upon the floor was placed an iron frame about six feet long, and two and a half feet wide, with round iron bars, placed transversely, about twelve inches apart. The man she came to seek was bound in a horizontal position upon this frame, with his neck projecting over the end of it. If he allowed his head to hang, the blood rushed to his brain, and suffocated him, while the effort to keep it raised strained every muscle to agony pitch. His face was purple, and he foamed at the mouth. Sylvia uttered a cry.

“This is no punishment; it’s murder! Who ordered this?”

“The Commandant,” said Troke, sullenly.

“I don’t believe it. Loose him!”

“I daren’t, mam,” said Troke.

“Loose him, I say! Hailey!—you, sir, there!” The noise had brought several warders to the spot. “Do you hear me? Do you know who I am? Loose him, I say!” In her eagerness and compassion, she was on her knees by the side of the infernal machine, plucking at the ropes with her delicate fingers. “Wretches, you have cut his flesh! He is dying! Help! You have killed him!”

The prisoner, in fact, seeing this angel of mercy stooping over him, and hearing close to him the tones of a voice that for seven years he had heard but in his dreams, had fainted. Troke and Hailey, alarmed by her vehemence, dragged the stretcher out into the light, and hastily cut the lashings. Dawes rolled off like a log, and his head fell against Mrs. Frere. Troke roughly pulled him aside, and called for water. Sylvia, trembling with sympathy, and pale with passion, turned upon the crew. “How long has he been like this?”

“An hour,” said Troke.

“A lie!” said a stern voice at the door.
“He has been there nine hours!”

“Wretches!” cried Sylvia, “you shall hear more of this. Oh, oh! I am sick!”—she felt for the wall — “I — I ——.” North watched her with agony on his face, but did not move. “I faint. I—” —she uttered a despairing cry that was not without a touch of anger. “Mr. North! do you not see? Oh! Take me home—take me home!” and she would have fallen across the body of the tortured prisoner had not North caught her in his arms.

Rufus Dawes, awaking from his stupor, saw, in the midst of a sunbeam which penetrated a window in the corridor, the woman who came to save his body supported by the priest who came to save his soul; and staggering to his knees, he stretched out his hands with a hoarse cry. Perhaps something in the action brought back to the dimmed remembrance of the Commandant's wife the image of a similar figure stretching forth its hands to a frightened child in the mysterious far-off time. She started, and pushing back her hair, bent a wistful, terrified gaze upon the face of the kneeling man, as though she would fain read there an explana-

tion of the shadowy memory which haunted her. It is possible that she would have spoken, but North—thinking the excitement had produced one of those hysterical crises which were common to her—gently drew her, still gazing, back towards the gate. The convict's arms fell, and an undefinable presentiment of evil chilled him as he beheld the priest—emotion pallid in his cheeks—slowly draw the fair young creature from out the sunlight into the grim shadow of the heavy archway. For an instant the gloom swallowed them, and it seemed to Dawes that the strange wild man of God had in that instant become a man of Evil—blighting the brightness and the beauty of the innocence that clung to him. For an instant—and then they passed out of the prison archway into the free air of heaven—and the sunlight glowed golden on their faces.

“You are ill,” said North. “You will faint. Why do you look so wildly?”

“What is it?” she whispered, more in answer to her own thoughts than to his question—“what is it that links me to that man? What deed—what terror—what memory! I tremble with crowding thoughts, that die ere they can whisper to me. Oh, that prison!”

“Look up ; we are in the sunshine.”

She passed her hand across her brow, sighing heavily, as one awaking from a disturbed slumber—shuddered, and withdrew her arm from his. North interpreted the action correctly, and the blood rushed to his face. “Pardon me, you cannot walk alone ; you will fall. I will leave you at the gate.”

In truth she would have fallen had he not again assisted her. She turned upon him eyes whose reproachful sorrow had almost forced him to a confession, but he bowed his head and held silence. They reached the house, and he placed her tenderly in a chair. “Now you are safe, madam, I will leave you.”

She burst into tears. “Why do you treat me thus, Mr. North ? What have I done to make you hate me ?”

“Hate you !” said North, with trembling lips. “Oh, no, I do not—do not *hate* you. I am rude in my speech, abrupt in my manner. You must forget it, and—and *me*.”

A horse’s feet crashed upon the gravel, and an instant after Maurice Frere burst into the room. Returning from the Cascades, he had met Troke, and learned the release of the prisoner. Furious at this usurpation of authority by his wife, his self-esteem wounded

by the thought that she had witnessed his mean revenge upon the man he had so infamously wronged, and his natural brutality enhanced by brandy, he had made for the house at full gallop, determined to assert his authority. Blind with rage, he saw no one but his wife. "What the devil's this I hear? *You* have been meddling in my business! *You* release prisoners! *You*——"

"Captain Frere!" said North, stepping forward to assert the restraining presence of a stranger. Frere started, astonished at the intrusion of the chaplain. Here was another outrage of his dignity, another insult to his supreme authority. In its passion, his gross mind leapt to the worst conclusion.

"You here, too! What do you want here——with my wife! This is your *quarrel*, is it?" His eyes glanced wrathfully from one to the other; and he strode towards North. "You infernal hypocritical lying scoundrel, if it wasn't for your black coat, I'd——"

"Maurice!" cried Sylvia, in an agony of shame and terror, striving to place a restraining hand upon his arm. He turned upon her with so fiercely infamous a curse, that North, pale with righteous rage, seemed

prompted to strike the burly ruffian to the earth. For a moment, the two men faced each other, and then Frere, muttering threats of vengeance against each and all—convict, gaolers, wife, and priest—flung the suppliant woman violently from him, and rushed from the room. She fell heavily against the wall, and as the chaplain raised her, he heard the hoof-strokes of the departing horse.

“Oh!” cried Sylvia, covering her face with trembling hands, “let me leave this place.”

North, enfolding her in his arms, strove to soothe her with incoherent words of comfort. Dizzy with the blow she had received, she clung to him sobbing. Twice he tried to tear himself away, but had he loosed his hold she would have fallen. He could not hold her—bruised, suffering, and in tears—thus against his heart, and keep silence. In a torrent of agonized eloquence the story of his love burst from his lips. “Why should you be thus tortured?” he cried. “Heaven never willed you to be mated to that boor—you, whose life should be all sunshine. Leave him—leave him. He has cast you off. We have both suffered. Let us leave this dreadful place—this isthmus between earth and hell! I will give you happiness.”

“I am going,” she said, faintly. “I had already arranged to go.”

North trembled. “It was not of my seeking. Fate has willed it. We go together!”

They looked at each other—she felt the fever of his blood, she read his passion in his eyes, she comprehended the “hatred” he had affected for her, and, deadly pale, drew back the cold hand he held.

“Go!” she murmured. “If you love me, leave me—leave me! Do not see me or speak to me again——” her silence added the words she could not utter,——“*till then.*”



CHAPTER XIV.

GETTING READY FOR SEA.

MAURICE FRERE'S passion had spent itself in that last act of violence. He did not return to the prison, as he promised himself, but turned into the road that led to the Cascades. He repented him of his suspicions. There was nothing strange in the presence of the chaplain. Sylvia had always liked the man, and an apology for his conduct had doubtless removed her anger. To make a mountain out of a molehill was the act of an idiot. It was natural that she should release Dawes—women *were* so tender-hearted. A few well-chosen, calmly-uttered platitudes anent the necessity for treatment that, to those unaccus-

tomed to the desperate wickedness of convicts, must appear harsh, would have served his turn far better than bluster and abuse. Moreover, North was to sail in the *Lady Franklin*, and might put in execution his threats of official complaint, unless he was carefully dealt with. To put Dawes again to the torture, would be to show to Troke and his friends that the "Commandant's wife" had acted without the "Commandant's authority," and that must not be shown. He would not return and patch up a peace. His wife would sail in the same vessel with North, and he would in a few days be left alone on the island to pursue his "discipline" unchecked. With this intent he returned to the prison, and gravely informed poor Troke that he was astonished at his barbarity. "Mrs. Frere, who most luckily had appointed to meet me this evening at the prison, tells me that the poor devil Dawes had been on the stretcher since seven o'clock in the morning."

"You ordered it fust thing, yer honour," said Troke.

"Yes, you fool, but I didn't order you to keep the man there for nine hours, did I? Why, you scoundrel, you might have killed him!" Troke scratched his head in bewil-

derment. "Take his irons off, and put him in a separate cell in the old jail. If a man is a murderer, that is no reason you should take the law into your own hands, is it? You'd better take care, Mr. Troke." On the way back he met the chaplain, who, seeing him, made for a bypath in curious haste. "Hal-loo!" roared Frere. "Hi! Mr. North!" North paused, and the Commandant made at him abruptly. "Look here, sir, I was rude to you just now—devilish rude. Most ungentlemanly of me. I must apologize." North bowed, without speaking, and tried to pass.

"You must excuse my violence," Frere went on. "I'm bad tempered, and I didn't like my wife interfering. Women, don't you know, don't see these things—don't understand these scoundrels." North again bowed. "Why, d—n it, how savage you look! Quite ghastly, bigod! I must have said most outrageous things. Forget and forgive, you know. Come home and have some dinner."

"I cannot enter your house again, sir," said North, in tones more agitated than the occasion would seem to warrant.

Frere shrugged his great shoulders with a clumsy affectation of good humour, and held out

his hand. "Well, shake hands, parson. You'll have to take care of Mrs. Frere on the voyage, and we may as well make up our differences before you start. Shake hands."

"Let me pass, sir!" cried North, with heightened colour; and ignoring the proffered hand, strode savagely on.

"You've a d——d fine temper for a parson," said Frere to himself. "However, if you won't, you won't. Hang me if I'll ask you again." Nor, when he reached home, did he fare better in his efforts at reconciliation with his wife. Sylvia met him with the icy front of a woman whose pride has been wounded too deeply for tears.

"Say no more about it," she said. "I am going to my father. If you want to explain your conduct, explain it to him."

"Come, Sylvia," he urged; "I was a brute, I know. Forgive me."

"It is useless to ask me," she said; "I cannot. I have forgiven you so much during the last seven years."

He attempted to embrace her, but she withdrew herself loathingly from his arms. He swore a great oath at her, and, too obstinate to argue farther, sulked. Blunt coming in about some ship matters, the pair drank

rum. Sylvia went to her room, and occupied herself with some minor details of clothes-packing (it is wonderful how women find relief from thoughts in household care), while North, poor fool, seeing from his window the light in hers, sat staring at it, alternately cursing and praying.

In the meantime, the unconscious cause of all this—Rufus Dawes—sat in his new cell, wondering at the chance which had procured him comfort, and blessing the fair hands that had brought it to him. He doubted not but that Sylvia had interceded with his tormentor, and by her gentle pleading brought him ease. “God bless her,” he murmured. “I have wronged her all these years. She did not know that I suffered.” He waited anxiously for North to visit him that he might have his belief confirmed. “I will get him to thank her for me,” he thought. But North did not come for two whole days. No one came but his gaolers; and, gazing from his prison window upon the sea that almost washed its walls, he saw the schooner at anchor, mocking him with a liberty he could not achieve. On the third day, however, North came. His manner was constrained and abrupt. His eyes wandered uneasily, and he seemed

burdened with thoughts which he dared not utter.

"I want you to thank her for me, Mr. North," said Dawes.

"Thank whom?"

"Mrs. Frere."

The unhappy priest shuddered at hearing the name.

"I do not think you owe any thanks to her. Your irons were removed by the Commandant's order."

"But by her persuasion. I feel sure of it. Ah, I was wrong to think she had forgotten me. Ask her for her forgiveness."

"Forgiveness!" said North, recalling the scene in the prison. "What have you done to need her forgiveness?"

"I doubted her," said Rufus Dawes. "I thought her ungrateful and treacherous. I thought she delivered me again into the bondage from whence I had escaped. I thought she had betrayed me—betrayed me to the villain whose base life I saved for her sweet sake."

"What do you mean?" asked North. "You never spoke to me of this."

"No, I had vowed to bury the knowledge of it in my own breast—it was too bitter to speak."

“ Saved his life !”

“ Ay, and hers ! *I* made the boat that carried her to freedom. *I* held her in my arms, and took the bread from my own lips to feed her !”

“ She cannot know this,” said North, in an undertone.

“ She has forgotten it, perhaps, for she was but a child. But you will remind her, will you not ? You will do me justice in her eyes before I die ? You will get her forgiveness for me ?”

North could not explain why such an interview as the convict desired was impossible, and so he promised.

“ She is going away in the schooner,” said he, concealing the fact of his own departure. “ I will see her before she goes, and tell her.”

“ God bless you, sir,” said poor Dawes. “ Now pray with me ;” and the wretched priest mechanically repeated one of the formulæ his church prescribes.

The next day he told his penitent that Mrs. Frere had forgiven him. This was a lie. He had not seen her ; but what should a lie be to him now ? Lies were needful in the tortuous path he had undertaken to

tread. Yet the deceit he was forced to practise cost him many a pang. He had succumbed to his passion, and to win the love for which he yearned, had voluntarily abandoned truth and honour; but standing thus alone with his sin, he despised and hated himself. To deaden remorse and drown reflection, he had recourse to brandy; and though the fierce excitement of his hopes and fears steeled him against the stupefying action of the liquor, he was rendered by it incapable of calm reflection. In certain nervous conditions our mere physical powers are proof against the action of alcohol, and though ten times more drunk than the toper, who, incoherently stammering, reels into the gutter, we can walk erect and talk with fluency. Indeed, in this artificial exaltation of the sensibilities, men often display a brilliant wit, and an acuteness of comprehension, calculated to delight their friends, and terrify their physicians. North had reached this condition of brain-drunkenness. In plain terms, he was trembling on the verge of madness.

The days passed swiftly, and Blunt's preparations for sea were completed. There were two stern cabins in the schooner, one of which was appropriated to Mrs. Frere, while

the other were set apart for North. Maurice had not attempted to renew his overtures of friendship, and the chaplain had not spoken. Mindful of Sylvia's last words, he had resolved not to meet her until fairly embarked upon the voyage which he intended should link their fortunes together. On the morning of the 19th December, Blunt declared himself ready to set sail, and in the afternoon the two passengers came on board.

Rufus Dawes, gazing from his window upon the schooner that lay outside the reef, thought nothing of the fact that after the Commandant's boat had taken away the Commandant's wife, another boat should put off with the chaplain. It was quite natural that Mr. North should desire to bid his friends farewell, and through the hot still afternoon he watched for the returning boat, hoping that the chaplain would bring him some message from the woman whom he was never to see more on earth. The hours wore on, however, and no breath of wind ruffled the surface of the sea. The day was exceedingly close and sultry, heavy dun clouds hung on the horizon, and it seemed probable that unless a thunderstorm should clear the air before night, the calm would continue. Blunt, however, with

a true sailor's obstinacy in regard to weather, swore there would be a breeze, and held to his purpose of sailing. The hot afternoon passed away in a sultry sunset, and it was not until the shades of evening had begun to fall that Rufus Dawes distinguished a boat detach itself from the sides of the schooner, and glide through the oily water to the jetty. The chaplain was returning, and in a few hours perhaps would be with him, to bring him the message of comfort, for which his soul thirsted. He stretched out his unshackled limbs, and throwing himself upon his stretcher, fell to recalling the past—his boat-building, the news of his fortune, his love, and his self-sacrifice.

North, however, was not returning to bring to the prisoner a message of comfort, but he was returning on purpose to see him, nevertheless. The unhappy man, torn by remorse and passion, had resolved upon a course of action which seemed to him a penance for his crime of deceit. He had determined to confess to Dawes that the message he brought was wholly fictitious, that he himself loved the wife of the Commandant, and that with her he was about to leave the island for ever. "I am no hypocrite," he thought, in his exaltation. "If I choose to sin, I will sin boldly ;

and this poor wretch, who looks up to me as an angel, shall know me for my true self."

The notion of thus destroying his own fame in the eyes of the man whom he had taught to love him, was pleasant to his diseased imagination. It was the natural outcome of the morbid condition of mind into which he had drifted, and he provided for the complete execution of his scheme with cunning born of the mischief working in his brain. It was desirable that the fatal stroke should be dealt at the last possible instant; that he should suddenly unveil his own infamy, and then depart, never to be seen again. To this end he had invented an excuse for returning to the shore at the latest possible moment. He had purposely left in his room a dressing-bag—the sort of article one is so likely to forget in the hurry of departure from one's house, and so certain to remember when the time comes to finally prepare for settling in another. He had ingeniously extracted from Blunt the fact that "he didn't expect a wind before dark, but wanted all ship-shape and aboard," and then, just as darkness fell, discovered that it was imperative for him to go ashore. Blunt cursed, but, if the chaplain insisted upon going, there was no help for it.

“There’ll be a breeze in less than two hours,” said he. “You’ve plenty of time, but if you’re not back before the first puff, I’ll sail without you, as sure as you’re born.” North assured him of his punctuality. “Don’t wait for me, Captain, if I’m not here,” said he, with the lightness of tone which men use to mask anxiety. “I’d take him at his word, Blunt,” said the Commandant, who was affably waiting to take final farewell of his wife. “Give way there, men,” he shouted to the crew, “and wait at the jetty. If Mr. North misses his ship through your laziness, you’ll pay for it.” So the boat set off, North laughing uproariously at the thought of being late. Frere observed with some astonishment that the chaplain wrapped himself in a boat cloak that lay in the stern sheets. “Does the fellow want to smother himself in a night like this!” was his remark. The truth was that, though his hands and head were burning, North’s teeth chattered with cold. Perhaps this was the reason why, when landed and out of eyeshot of the crew, he produced a pocket-flask of rum and eagerly drank. The spirit gave him courage for the ordeal to which he had condemned himself; and with steadied step, he reached the door of the old

prison. To his surprise, Gimblett refused him admission !

“ But I have come direct from the Commandant,” said North.

“ Got any order, sir ?”

“ Order ! No.”

“ I can’t let you in, your reverence,” said Gimblett.

“ I want to see the prisoner Dawes. I have a special message for him. I have come ashore on purpose.”

“ I am very sorry, sir——”

“ The ship will sail in two hours, man, and I shall miss her,” said North, indignant at being frustrated in his design. “ Let me pass !”

“ Upon my honour, sir, I daren’t,” said Gimblett, who was not without his good points. “ *You* know what authority is, sir, as well as I do.”

North was in despair, but a bright thought struck him—a thought that, in his soberer moments, would never have entered his head—he would buy admission. He produced the rum flask from beneath the sheltering cloak. “ Come, don’t talk nonsense to me, Gimblett. You don’t suppose I would come here *without* authority. Here take a pull at this, and

let me through." Gimblett's features relaxed into a smile. "Well, sir, I suppose it's all right, if you say so," said he. And clutching the rum bottle with one hand, he opened the door of Dawes's cell with the other.

North entered, and as the door closed behind him, the prisoner, who had been lying apparently asleep upon his bed, leapt up, and made as though to catch him by the throat.

Rufus Dawes had dreamt a dream. Alone, amid the gathering glooms, his fancy had recalled the past, and peopled it with memories. He thought that he was once more upon that barren strand where he had first met with the sweet child he loved. He lived again his life of usefulness and honour. He saw himself working at the boat, embarking, and putting out to sea. The fair head of the innocent girl was again pillowed on his breast; her young lips again murmured words of affection in his greedy ear. Frere was beside him, watching him, as he had watched before. Once again the grey sea spread around him, barren of succour. Once again, in the wild, wet morning, he beheld the American brig bearing down upon them, and saw the bearded

faces of the astonished crew. He saw Frere take the child in his arms and mount upon the deck; he heard the shout of delight that went up, and pressed again the welcoming hands which greeted the rescued castaways. The deck was crowded. All the folk he had ever known were there. He saw the white hair and stern features of Sir Richard Devine, and beside him stood, wringing her thin hands, his weeping mother. Then Frere strode forward, and after him John Rex, the convict, who, roughly elbowing through the crowd of prisoners and gaolers, would have reached the spot where stood Sir Richard Devine, but that the corpse of the murdered Lord Bellasis arose and thrust him back. How the hammers clattered in the shipbuilder's yard! Was it a coffin they were making? Not for Sylvia—surely not for her! The air grows heavy, lurid with flame, and black with smoke. The *Hydaspes* is on fire! Sylvia clings to her husband. Base wretch, would you shake her off! Look up; the midnight heaven is glittering with stars; above the smoke the air breathes delicately! One step—another! fix your eyes on mine—so—to my heart! Alas! she turns; he catches at her dress. What! It is a priest—a priest—who, smil-

ing with infernal joy, would drag her to the flaming gulf that yawns for him. The dreamer leaps at the wretch's throat, and crying, "Villain, was it for *this* fate I saved her?"——awakes to find himself struggling with the monster of his dream, the idol of his waking senses—"Mr. North."

North, paralyzed no less by the suddenness of the attack than by the words with which it was accompanied, let fall his cloak, and stood trembling before the prophetic accusation of the man whose curses he had come to earn.

"I was dreaming," said Rufus Dawes. "A terrible dream! But it has passed now. The message—you have brought me a message, have you not? Why—what ails you? You are pale—your knees tremble. Did my violence——?"

North recovered himself with a great effort. "It is nothing. Let us talk, for my time is short. You have thought me a good man—one blessed of God, one consecrated to a holy service; a man honest, pure, and truthful. I have returned to tell you the truth. I am none of these things." Rufus Dawes sat staring, unable to comprehend this madness. "I told you that the woman you loved—for

you *do* love her—sent you a message of forgiveness. I lied.”

“What!”

“I never told her of your confession. I never mentioned your name to her.”

“And she will go without knowing—Oh, Mr. North, what have you done?”

“Wrecked my own soul!” cried North, wildly, stung by the reproachful agony of the tone. “Do not cling to me. My task is done. You will hate me now. That is my wish—I merit it. Let me go, I say. I shall be too late.”

“Too late! For what?” He looked at the cloak—through the open window came the voices of the men in the boat—the memory of the rose, of the scene in the prison, flashed across him, and he understood it all. “Great Heaven, you go together!”

“Let me go,” repeated North, in a hoarse voice.

Rufus Dawes stepped between him and the door. “No, madman, I will not let you go, to do this great wrong, to kill this innocent young soul, who—God help her—loves you!” North, confounded at this sudden reversal of their position towards each other, crouched bewildered against the wall. “I say you shall

not go ! You shall not destroy your own soul and hers ! You love her ! So do I ; and my love is mightier than yours, for it shall save her !”

“ In God’s name——” cried the unhappy priest, striving to stop his ears.

“ Ay, in God’s name ! In the name of that God whom in my torments I had forgotten ! In the name of that God whom you taught me to remember ! That God who sent you to save me from despair, gives me strength to save you in my turn ! Oh, Mr. North—my teacher—my friend—my brother—by the sweet hope of mercy which you preached to me, be merciful to this erring woman !”

North lifted agonized eyes. “ But I love her ! Love her, do you hear ? What do you know of love ?”

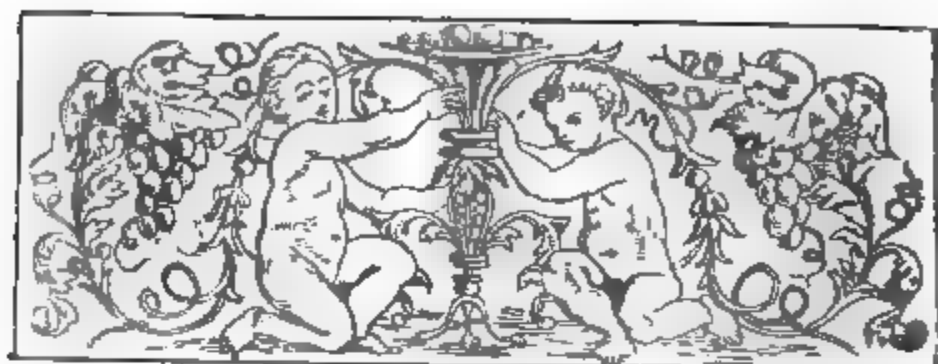
“ Love !” cried Rufus Dawes, his pale face radiant. “ Love ! Oh, it is you who do not know it. Love is the sacrifice of self, the death of all desire that is not for another’s good. Love is Godlike ! *You* love ?—no, no, your love is selfishness, and will end in shame ! Listen, I will tell you the history of such a love as yours.”

North, enthralled by the other’s overmaster-

ing will, fell back trembling. “What do you mean?”

“I will tell you the secret of my life, the reason why I am here. Come closer.”

* * * * *



CHAPTER XV.

THE DISCOVERY.

THE house in Clarges Street was duly placed at the disposal of Mrs. Richard Devine, who was installed in it, to the profound astonishment and disgust of Mr. Smithers and his fellow-servants. It only remained that the lady should be formally recognized by Lady Devine. The rest of the ingenious programme would follow as a matter of course. John Rex was well aware of the position which, in his assumed personality, he occupied in society. He knew that by the world of servants, of waiters, of those to whom servants and waiters could babble; of such turfites and men-about-town as had reason to inquire concerning Mr. Richard's

domestic affairs—no opinion could be expressed, save that “Devine’s married somebody, I hear,” with variations to the same effect. He knew well that the really great world, the Society, whose scandal would have been socially injurious, had long ceased to trouble itself with Mr. Richard Devine’s doings in any particular. If it had been reported that the Leviathan of the Turf had married his washerwoman, Society would only have intimated that “it was just what might have been expected of him.” To say the truth, however, Mr. Richard had rather hoped that—disgusted at his brutality—Lady Devine would have nothing more to do with him, and that the ordeal of presenting his wife would not be necessary. Lady Devine, however, had resolved on a different line of conduct. The intelligence concerning Mr. Richard Devine’s threatened proceedings nerved her to the confession of the dislike which had been long growing in her mind; aided the formation of those doubts, the shadows of which had now and then cast themselves upon her belief in the identity of the man who called himself her son.

“His conduct is brutal,” said she to her brother, “I cannot understand it.”

"It is more than brutal, it is unnatural," returned Francis Wade, and stole a look at her. "Moreover, he is married."

"Married!" cried Lady Devine.

"So he says," continued the other, producing the letter sent to him by Rex at Sarah's dictation. "He writes to me stating that his wife, whom he married last year abroad, has come to England, and wishes us to receive her."

"I will *not* receive her!" cried Lady Devine, rising and pacing the room.

"But that would be a declaration of war," said poor Francis, twisting an Italian onyx which adorned his irresolute hand, "I would not advise that."

Lady Devine stopped suddenly, with the gesture of one who has finally made a difficult and long-considered resolution. "Richard shall not sell this house," she said.

"But, my dear Ellinor," cried her brother in some alarm at this unwonted decision, "I am afraid that you can't prevent him."

"If he is the man he says he is, I can," returned she with effort.

Francis Wade gasped, "*If* he is the man! It is true—I have sometimes thought—— O Ellinor, can it be that we have been deceived!"

She came to him and leant upon him for support, as she had leant upon her son in the garden where they now stood, nineteen years ago. "I do not know, I am afraid to think. But between Richard and myself is a secret—a shameful secret, Frank, known to no other living person. If the man who threatens me does not know that secret, he is not my son. If he does know it——"

"Well, in Heaven's name, what then?"

"He knows that he has neither part nor lot in the fortune of the man who was my husband."

"Ellinor, you terrify me. What does this mean?"

"I will tell you if there be need to do so," said the unhappy lady. "But I cannot now. I never meant to speak of it again, even to him. Consider that it is hard to break a silence of nearly twenty years. Write to this man, and tell him that before I receive his wife, I wish to see him alone. No—do not let him come here until the truth be known. I will go to him."

It was with some trepidation that Mr. Richard, sitting with his wife on the afternoon of the 3rd May, 1846, awaited the

arrival of his mother. He had been very nervous and unstrung for some days past, and the prospect of the coming interview was, for some reason he could not explain to himself, weighty with fears. "What does she want to come alone for? And what can she have to say?" he asked himself. "She cannot suspect anything after all these years, surely?" He endeavoured to reason with himself, but in vain; the knock at the door which announced the arrival of his pretended mother made his heart jump.

"I feel deuced shaky, Sarah," he said. "Let's have a nip of something."

"You've been nipping too much for the last five years, Dick." (She had quite schooled her tongue to the new name.) "Your 'shakiness' is the result of 'nipping,' I'm afraid."

"Oh, don't preach, I am not in the humour for it."

"Help yourself, then. You are quite sure that you are ready with your story?"

The brandy revived him, and he rose with affected heartiness, "My dear mother, allow me to present to you——" He paused, for there was that in Lady Devine's face which confirmed his worst fears.

“I wish to speak to you alone,” she said, ignoring with steady eyes the woman whom she had ostensibly come to see.

John Rex hesitated, but Sarah saw the danger, and hastened to confront it. “A wife should be a husband’s best friend, madam. Your son married me of his own free will, and even his mother can have nothing to say to him which it is not my duty and privilege to hear. I am not a girl, as you can see, and I can bear whatever news you bring.”

Lady Devine bit her pale lips. She saw at once that the woman before her was not gently-born, but she felt also that she was a woman of higher mental calibre than herself. Prepared as she was for the worst, this sudden and open declaration of hostilities frightened her, as Sarah had calculated. She began to realize that if she was to prove equal to the task she had set herself, she must not waste her strength in skirmishing. Steadily refusing to look at Richard’s wife, she addressed herself to Richard. “My brother will be here in half an hour,” she said, as though the mention of his name would better her position in some way. “But I begged him to allow me to come first, in order that I might speak to you privately.”

“Well,” said John Rex, “we are in private. What have you to say?”

“I want to tell you that I forbid you to carry out the plan you have for breaking up Sir Richard’s property.”

“Forbid me!” cried Rex, much relieved. “Why, I only want to do what my father’s will enables me to do.”

“Your father’s will enables you to do nothing of the sort, and you know it.” She spoke, as though rehearsing a series of set-speeches, and Sarah watched her with growing alarm.

“Oh, nonsense!” cries John Rex, in sheer amazement. “I have a lawyer’s opinion on it.”

“Do you remember what took place at Hampstead this day nineteen years ago?”

“At Hampstead!” said Rex, grown suddenly pale. “This day nineteen years ago. No! What do you mean?”

“Do you not remember?” she continued, leaning forward eagerly, and speaking almost fiercely. “Do you not remember the reason why you left the house where you were born, and which you wish now to sell to strangers?”

John Rex stood dumbfounded, the blood suffusing his temples. He knew that among

the secrets of the man whose inheritance he had stolen was one which he had never gained—the secret of that sacrifice to which Lady Devine had once referred—and he felt that this secret was to be revealed to crush him now.

Sarah, trembling also, but more with rage than terror, swept towards Lady Devine. “Speak out!” she said, “if you have anything to say! Of what do you accuse my husband?”

“Of imposture!” cried Lady Devine, all her outraged maternity nerving her to abash her enemy. “This man may be your husband, but he is not my son!”

Now that the worst was out, John Rex, choking with passion, felt all the devil within him rebelling against defeat. “You are mad,” he said. “You have recognized me for three years, and now, because I want to claim that which is my own, you invent this lie. Take care how you provoke me. If I am not your son—you have recognized me as such. I stand upon the law and upon my rights.”

Lady Devine turned swiftly, and with both hands to her bosom, confronted him.

“You shall have your rights! You shall

have what the law allows you! Oh how blind I have been all these years. Persist in your infamous imposture. Call yourself Richard Devine still, and I will tell the world the shameful secret which my son died to hide. *Be* Richard Devine! Richard Devine was a bastard, and the law allows him—Nothing!”

There was no doubting the truth of her words. It was impossible that even a woman whose home had been desecrated, as hers had been, would invent a lie so self-condemning. Yet John Rex forced himself to appear to doubt, and his dry lips asked, “If then your husband was not the father of your son, who was?”

“My cousin, Armigell Esmè Wade, Lord Bellasis,” answered Lady Devine.

John Rex gasped for breath. His hand, tugging at his neck-cloth, rent away the linen that covered his choking throat. The whole horizon of his past was lit up by a lightning flash which stunned him. His brain, already enfeebled by excess, was unable to withstand this last shock. He staggered, and but for the cabinet against which he leant, would have fallen. The secret thoughts of his heart rose to his lips, and were uttered un-

consciously. "Lord Bellasis! He was my father also, and—I killed him!"

A dreadful silence fell, and then Lady Devine, stretching out her hands towards the self-confessed murderer, with a sort of frightful respect, said in a whisper, in which horror and supplication were strangely mingled, "What did you do with my son? Did you kill *him* also?"

But John Rex, wagging his head from side to side, like a beast in the shambles that has received a mortal stroke, made no reply. Sarah Purfoy, awed as she was by the dramatic force of the situation, nevertheless remembered that Francis Wade might arrive at any moment, and saw her last opportunity for safety. She advanced and touched the mother on the shoulder.

"Your son is alive!"

"Where?"

"Will you promise not to hinder us leaving this house if I tell you?"

"Yes, yes."

"Will you promise to keep the confession which you have heard secret, until we have left England?"

"I promise anything. In God's name, woman, if you have a woman's heart, speak! Where is my son?"

Sarah Purfoy rose over the enemy who had defeated her, and said in level, deliberate accents, "They call him Rufus Dawes. He is a convict at Norfolk Island, transported for life for the murder which you heard my husband confess to having committed—— Ah!"——

Lady Devine had fainted.



CHAPTER XVI.

FIFTEEN HOURS.

SARAH flew to Rex. "Rouse yourself, John, for heaven's sake. We have not a moment."

John Rex passed his hand over his forehead wearily.

"I cannot think. I am broken down. I am ill. My brain seems dead."

Nervously watching the prostrate figure on the floor, she hurried on bonnet, cloak, and veil, and in a twinkling had him outside the house and into a cab.

"Thirty-nine, Lombard Street. Quick!"

"You won't give me up?" said Rex, turning dull eyes upon her.

"Give you up! No. But the police will

be after us so soon as that woman can speak, and her brother summon his lawyer. I know what her promise is worth. We have got about fifteen hours."

"I can't go far, Sarah," said he; "I am sleepy and stupid."

She repressed the terrible fear that tugged at her heart, and strove to rally him.

"You've been drinking too much, John. Now sit still and be good, while I go and get some money for you."

She hurried into the bank, and her name secured her an interview with the manager at once.

"That's a rich woman," said one of the clerks to his friend.

"A widow, too! Chance for you, Tom," returned the other; and, presently, from out the sacred presence came another clerk with a request for "a draft on Sydney for three thousand, less premium," and bearing a cheque signed "Sarah Carr," for £200, which he "took" in notes, and so returned again.

From the bank she was taken to Green's Shipping Office.

"I want a cabin in the first ship for Sydney, please."

The shipping-clerk looked at a board.

"The *Highflyer* goes in twelve days, madam, and there is one cabin vacant."

"I want to go at once—to-morrow or next day."

He smiled. "I am afraid that is impossible," said he.

Just then one of the partners came out of his private room with a telegram in his hand, and beckoned the shipping clerk. Sarah was about to depart for another office, when the clerk came hastily back.

"Just the thing for you, ma'am," said he. "We have got a telegram from a gentleman who has a first cabin in the *Dido*, to say that his wife has been taken ill, and he must give up his berth."

"When does the *Dido* sail?"

"To-morrow morning. She is at Plymouth, waiting for the mails. If you go down to-night by the mail-train which leaves at 9.30, you will be in plenty of time, and we will telegraph."

"I will take the cabin. How much?"

"One hundred and thirty pounds, madam," said he.

She produced her notes. "Pray count it yourself. We have been delayed in the same

manner ourselves. My husband is a great invalid, but I was not so fortunate as to get some one to refund *us* our passage-money."

"What name did you say?" asked the clerk, counting. "Mr. and Mrs. Carr. Thank you," and he handed her the slip of paper.

"Thank *you*," said Sarah, with a bewitching smile, and swept down to her cab again.

John Rex was gnawing his nails in sullen apathy. She displayed the passage-ticket. "You are saved. By the time Mr. Devine gets his wits together, and his sister recovers her speech, we shall be past pursuit."

"To Sydney!" cried Rex, angrily, looking at the warrant. "Why there of all places in God's earth?"

Sarah surveyed him with an expression of contempt, "Because *your* scheme has failed. Now this is mine. You have deserted me once; you will do so again in any other country. You are a murderer, a villain, and a coward, but you suit me. I save you, but I mean to keep you. I will bring you to Australia, where the first trooper will arrest you at my bidding as an escaped convict. If you don't like to come, stay behind. I don't care. I am rich. I have done no wrong.

The law cannot touch me—Do you agree? Then tell the man to drive to Silver's in Cornhill for your outfit."

Having housed him at last—all gloomy and despondent—in a quiet tavern near the railway station, she tried to get some information as to this last revealed crime.

"How came you to kill Lord Bellasis?" she asked him quietly.

"I had found out from my mother that I was his natural son, and one day riding home from a pigeon match I told him so. He taunted me—and I struck him. I did not mean to kill him, but he was an old man, and in my passion I struck hard. As he fell, I thought I saw a horseman among the trees, and I galloped off. My ill-luck began then, for the same night I was arrested at the coiner's."

"But I thought there was robbery," said she.

"Not by me. But, for God's sake, talk no more about it. I am sick—my brain is going round. I want to sleep."

"Be careful, please! Lift him gently!" said Mrs. Carr, as the boat ranged alongside the

Dido, gaunt and grim, in the early dawn of a bleak May morning.

“What’s the matter?” asked the officer of the watch perceiving the bustle in the boat.

“Gentleman seems to have had a stroke,” said a boatman.

It was so. There was no fear that John Rex would escape again from the woman he had deceived. The infernal genius of Sarah Purfoy had saved her lover at last—but saved him only that she might nurse him till he died—died ignorant even of her tenderness, a mere animal, lacking the intellect he had in his selfish wickedness abused.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE REDEMPTION.

* * * * *

—“**THAT** is my story. Let it plead with you to turn you from your purpose, and to save her. The punishment of sin falls not upon the sinner only. A deed once done lives in its consequence for ever, and this tragedy of shame and crime to which my felon's death is a fitting end, is but the outcome of a selfish sin like yours!”

It had grown dark in the prison, and as he ceased speaking, Rufus Dawes felt a trembling hand seize his own. It was that of the chaplain.

“Let me hold your hand!—Sir Richard Devine did not murder your father. He was

murdered by a horseman who, riding with him, struck him and fled."

"Merciful God! How do you know this?"

"Because I saw the murder committed, because—don't let go my hand—I robbed the body."

"*You?*"

"In my youth I was a gambler. Lord Bellasis won money from me, and to pay him I forged two bills of exchange. Unscrupulous and cruel, he threatened to expose me if I did not give him double the sum. Forgery was death in those days, and I strained every nerve to buy back the proofs of my folly. I succeeded. I was to meet Lord Bellasis near his own house at Hampstead on the night of which you speak, to pay the money and receive the bills. When I saw him fall I galloped up, but instead of pursuing his murderer I rifled his pocket-book of my forgeries. I was afraid to give evidence at the trial, or I might have saved you.—Ah! you have let go my hand!"

"God forgive you!" said Rufus Dawes, and then was silent.

"Speak!" cried North. "Speak, or you will make me mad. Reproach me! Spurn

me! Spit upon me! You cannot think worse of me than I do myself."

But the other, his head buried in his hands, did not answer, and with a wild gesture, North staggered out of the cell.

Nearly an hour had passed since the chaplain had placed the rum flask in his hand, and Gimblett observed, with semi-drunken astonishment, that it was not yet empty. He had intended, in the first instance, to have taken but one sup in payment of his courtesy—for Gimblett was conscious of his own weakness in the matter of strong waters—but as he waited and waited, the one sup became two, the two three, and at length more than half the contents of the bottle had moistened his gullet, and maddened him for more. Gimblett was in a quandary. If he didn't finish the flask, he would be oppressed with an everlasting regret. If he did finish it he would be drunk; and to be drunk on duty was the one unpardonable sin. He looked across the darkness of the sea, to where the rising and falling light marked the schooner. The Commandant was a long way off! A faint breeze, which had—according to Blunt's prophecy—arisen with the night, brought up to him the

voices of the boat's crew from the jetty below him. His friend Jack Mannix was coxswain of her. He would give Jack a drink. Leaving the gate, he advanced to the edge of the embankment, and, putting his head over, called out to his friend. The breeze, however, which was momentarily freshening, carried his voice away; and Jack Mannix, hearing nothing, continued his conversation. Gimblett was just drunk enough to be virtuously indignant at this incivility, and seating himself on the edge of the bank, swallowed the remainder of the rum at a draught. The effect upon his enforcedly temperate stomach was very touching. He made one feeble attempt to get upon his legs, cast a reproachful glance at the rum bottle, essayed to drink out of its spirituous emptiness, and then, with a smile of reckless contentment, cursed the island and all its contents and fell fast asleep.

North, coming out of the prison, did not notice the absence of the gaoler; indeed, he was not in a condition to notice anything. Bare-headed, without his cloak, with staring eyes and clenched hands, he rushed through the gates into the night as one who flies headlong from some fearful

vision. It seemed that, absorbed in his own thoughts, he took no heed to his steps, for instead of taking the path which led to the sea, he kept along the more familiar one that led to his own cottage on the hill. "This man a convict!" he cried. "He is a hero—a martyr! What a life! Love! Yes, that is love indeed! Oh, James North, how base art thou in the eyes of God beside this despised outcast!" And so muttering, tearing his grey hair, and beating his throbbing temples with clenched hands, he reached his own room, and saw, by the light of the new-born moon, the dressing-bag and candle standing on the table as he had left them. They brought again to his mind the recollection of the task that was before him. He lighted the candle, and, taking the bag in his hand, cast one last look round the chamber which had witnessed his futile struggles against that baser part of himself which had at last triumphed. It was so. Fate had condemned him to sin, and he must now fulfil the doom he might once have averted. Already he fancied he could see the speck that was the schooner move slowly away from the prison shore. He must not linger; they would be waiting for him at the jetty.

As he turned, the moonbeams—as yet unobscured by the rapidly gathering clouds—flung a silver streak across the sea, and across that streak North saw a boat pass. Was his distracted brain playing him false?—in the stern sat, wrapped in a cloak, the figure of a man! A fierce gust of wind drove the sea-rack over the moon, and the boat disappeared, as though swallowed up by the gathering storm. North staggered back as the truth struck him.

He remembered how he had said, “I will redeem him with my own blood!” Was it possible that a just heaven had thus decided to allow the man whom a coward had condemned, to escape, and to punish the coward who remained? Oh, this man deserved freedom; he was honest, noble, truthful! How different from himself—a hateful self-lover, an unchaste priest, a drunkard. The looking-glass, in which the saintly face of Meekin was soon to be reflected, stood upon the table, and North, peering into it, with one hand mechanically thrust into the bag, started in insane rage, at the pale face and bloodshot eyes he saw there. What a hateful wretch he had become! The last fatal impulse of insanity which seeks relief from its own hideous self came upon him, and his fingers

closed convulsively upon the object they had been seeking.

“It is better so,” he muttered, addressing, with fixed eyes, his own detested image. “I have examined you long enough. I have read your heart, and written out your secrets! You are but a shell—the shell that holds a corrupted and sinful heart. *He* shall live; *you* shall die!” The rapid motion of his arm overturned the candle, and all was dark.

Rufus Dawes, overpowered by the revelation so suddenly made to him, had remained for a few moments motionless in his cell, expecting to hear the heavy clang of the outer door, which should announce to him the departure of the chaplain. But he did not hear it, and it seemed to him that the air in the cell had grown suddenly cooler. He went to the door, and looked into the narrow corridor, expecting to see the scowling countenance of Gimblett. To his astonishment the door of the prison was wide open, and not a soul in sight. His first thought was of North. Had the story he had told, coupled with the entreaties he had lavished, sufficed to turn him from his purpose?

He looked around. The night was falling

sullenly; the wind was mounting; from beyond the bar came the hoarse murmur of an angry sea. If the schooner was to sail that night, she had best get out into deep waters. Where was the chaplain? Pray heaven the delay had been sufficient, and they had sailed without him. Yet they would be sure to meet. He advanced a few steps nearer, and looked about him. Was it possible that, in his madness, the chaplain had been about to commit some violence which had drawn the trusty Gimblett from his post? "Gr-r-r-r! Ouph!" The trusty Gimblett was lying at his feet—dead drunk!

"Hi! Hoho! Hillo there!" roared somebody from the jetty below. "Be that you, Muster Noarth! We ain't too much tiam, sur!"

From the uncurtained windows of the chaplain's house on the hill beamed the newly-lighted candle. They in the boat did not see it, but it brought to the prisoner a wild hope that made his heart bound. He ran back to his cell, clapped on North's wide-awake, and flinging the cloak hastily about him, came quickly down the steps. If the moon should shine out now!

"Jump in, sir," said unsuspecting Mannix,

thinking only of the flogging he had been threatened with. "It'll be a dirty night, this night! Put this over your knees, sir. Shove her off! Give way!" And they were afloat. But one glimpse of moonlight fell upon the slouched hat and cloaked figure, and the boat's crew, engaged in the dangerous task of navigating the reef in the teeth of the rising gale, paid no attention to the chaplain.

"By George, lads, we're but just in time!" cried Mannix; and they laid alongside the schooner, black in blackness. "Up ye go, yer honour, quick!" The wind had shifted, and was now off the shore. Blunt, who had begun to repent of his obstinacy, but would not confess it, thought the next best thing to riding out the gale was to get out to open sea. "Damn the parson," he had said, in all heartiness; "we can't wait all night for him. Heave ahead, Mr. Johnson!" And so the anchor was a-trip as Rufus Dawes ran up the side.

The Commandant, already pulling off in his own boat, roared a coarse farewell. "Good-bye, North! It was touch and go with ye!" adding, "Curse the fellow, he's too proud to answer!"

The chaplain indeed spoke to no one, and plunging down the hatchway, made for the

stern cabins. "Close shave, your reverence!" said a respectful somebody, opening a door. It was; but the clergyman did not say so. He double-locked the door, and hardly realizing the danger he had escaped, flung himself on the bunk, panting. Over his head he heard the rapid tramp of feet and the cheery

Yo hi-oh ! and a rumbelow !

of the men at the capstan. He could smell the sea, and through the open window of the cabin could distinguish the light in the chaplain's house on the hill. The trampling ceased, the vessel began to move swiftly—the Commandant's boat appeared below him for an instant, making her way back—the *Lady Franklin* had set sail. With his eyes fixed on the tiny light, he strove to think what was best to be done. It was hopeless to think that he could maintain the imposture which, favoured by the darkness and confusion, he had hitherto successfully attempted. He was certain to be detected at Hobart Town, even if he could lie concealed during his long and tedious voyage. That mattered little, however. He had saved Sylvia, for North had been left behind. Poor North ! As the thought of pity came to him, the light he looked at was

suddenly extinguished, and Rufus Dawes, compelled thereto as by an irresistible power, fell upon his knees and prayed for the pardon and happiness of the man who had redeemed him. .

* * * *

“That’s a gun from the shore,” said Partridge, the mate, “and they’re burning a red light. There’s a prisoner escaped. Shall we lie-to?”

“Lie-to!” cried old Blunt, with a tremendous oath. “We’ll have suthin else to do. Lock there!”

The sky to the northward was streaked with a belt of livid green colour, above which rose a mighty black cloud, whose shape was ever changing.



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CYCLONE.

BLUNT, recognizing the meteoric heralds of danger, began to regret his obstinacy. He saw that a hurricane was approaching.

Along the south coast of the Australian continent, though the usual westerly winds and gales of the highest latitudes prevail during the greater portion of the year, hurricanes are not unfrequent. Gales commence at N.W. with a low barometer, increasing at W. and S.W., and gradually veering to the South. True cyclones occur at New Zealand. The log of the *Adelaide* for 29th February, 1870, describes one which travelled at the

rate of ten miles an hour, and had all the veerings, calm centre, &c., of a true tropical hurricane. Now a cyclone occurring off the west coast of New Zealand would travel from the New Hebrides, where such storms are hideously frequent, and envelope Norfolk Island, passing directly across the track of vessels coming from South America to Sydney. It was one of these rotatory storms, an escaped tempest of the tropics, which threatened the *Lady Franklin*.

The ominous calm which had brooded over the island during the day had given place to a smart breeze from the north-east, and though the schooner had been sheltered at her anchorage under the lee of the island (the "harbour" looked nearly due south), when once fairly out to sea, Blunt saw it would be impossible to put back in the teeth of the gale. Haply, however, the full fury of the storm would not overtake them till they had gained sea-room.

Rufus Dawes, exhausted with the excitement through which he had passed, had slept for two or three hours, when he was awakened by the motion of the vessel going on the other tack. He rose to his feet, and found

himself in complete darkness. Overhead was the noise of trampling feet, and he could distinguish the hoarse tones of Blunt bellowing orders. Astonished at the absence of the moonlight which had so lately silvered the sea, he flung open the cabin window and looked out. As we have said, the cabin allotted to North was one of the two stern cabins, and from it the convict had a full view of the approaching storm.

The sight was one of wild grandeur. The huge black cloud which hung in the horizon had changed its shape. Instead of a curtain it was an arch. Beneath this vast and magnificent portal, shone a dull phosphoric light. Across this livid space pale flashes of sheet-lightning passed noiselessly. Behind it was a dull and threatening murmur, made up of the grumbling of thunder, the falling of rain, and the roar of contending wind and water. The lights of the prison-island had disappeared, so rapid had been the progress of the schooner under the steady breeze, and the ocean stretched around, black and desolate. Gazing upon this gloomy expanse, Rufus Dawes observed a strange phenomenon—lightning appeared to burst upwards from the sullen bosom of the sea. At intervals, the

darkly rolling waves flashed fire, and streaks of flame shot upwards. The wind increased in violence, and the arch of light was fringed with rain. A dull red glow hung around, like the reflection of a conflagration. Suddenly, a tremendous peal of thunder, accompanied by a terrific downfall of rain, rattled along the sky. The arch of light disappeared, as though some invisible hand had shut the slide of a giant lantern. A great wall of water rushed roaring over the level plain of the sea, and with an indescribable medley of sounds, in which tones of horror, triumph, and torture were blended, the cyclone swooped upon them.

Rufus Dawes comprehended that the elements had come to save or destroy him. In that awful instant the natural powers of the man rose equal to the occasion. In a few hours his fate would be decided, and it was necessary that he should take all precautions. One of two events seemed inevitable—he would either be drowned where he lay, or, should the vessel weather the storm, he would be forced upon deck, and the desperate imposture he had attempted be discovered. For a moment despair overwhelmed him, and he contemplated the raging sea as though he

would cast himself into it, and thus end his troubles. The tones of a woman's voice recalled him to himself. Cautiously unlocking the cabin door, he peered out. The cuddy was lighted by a swinging lamp which revealed Sylvia questioning one of the women concerning the storm. As Rufus Dawes looked, he saw her glance, with an air half of hope, half of fear, towards the door behind which he lurked, and he understood that she expected to see the chaplain. Locking the door, he proceeded hastily to dress himself in North's clothes. He would wait until his aid was absolutely required, and then rush out. In the darkness, Sylvia would mistake him for the priest. He could convey her to the boat—if recourse to the boats should be rendered necessary—and then take the hazard of his fortune. While she was in danger, his place was near her.

From the deck of the vessel the scene was appalling. The clouds had closed in. The arch of light had disappeared, and all was a dull windy blackness. Gigantic seas seemed to mount in the horizon and sweep towards and upon them. It was as though the ship lay in the vortex of a whirlpool, so high on

either side of her were piled the rough pyramidal masses of sea. Mighty gusts arose—claps of wind which seemed like strokes of thunder. A sail loosened from its tackling was torn away and blown out to sea, disappearing like a shred of white paper to leeward. The mercury in the barometer marked 29.50. Blunt, who had been at the rum bottle, swore great oaths that no soul on board would see another sun; and when Partridge rebuked him for blasphemy at such a moment, wept spirituous tears.

The howling of the wind was benumbing; the very fury of sound enfeebled while it terrified. The sailors, horror-stricken, crawled about the deck, clinging to anything they thought most secure. It was impossible to raise the head to look to windward. The eyelids were driven together, and the face stung by the swift and biting spray. Men breathed this atmosphere of salt and wind, and became sickened. Partridge felt that orders were useless—the man at his elbow could not have heard them. The vessel lay almost on her beam-ends, with her helm up, stripped even of the sails which had been furled upon the yards. Mortal hands could do nothing for her.

By five o'clock in the morning, the gale had reached its height. The heavens showered out rain and lightnings; rain which the wind blew away before it reached the ocean, lightnings which the ravenous and mountainous waves swallowed before they could pierce the gloom. The ship lay over on her side, held there by the madly rushing wind, which seemed to flatten down the sea, cutting off the tops of the waves, and breaking them into fine white spray, which covered the ocean like a thick cloud, as high as the topmast heads. Each gust seemed unsurpassable in intensity, but was succeeded, after a pause, that was not a lull but a gasp, by one of more frantic violence. The barometer stood at 27.82. The ship was a mere labouring, crazy wreck, that might sink at any moment. At half-past three o'clock the barometer had fallen to 27.62. Save when lighted by occasional flashes of sheet-lightning, which showed to the cowed wretches their awestricken faces, this tragedy of the elements was performed in a darkness which was almost palpable.

Suddenly the mercury rose to 29.90, and, with one awful shriek, the wind dropped to a calm. The *Lady Franklin* had reached the centre of the cyclone. Partridge, glancing to

where the great body of drunken Blunt rolled helplessly lashed to the wheel, felt a strange selfish joy thrill him. If the ship survived, the drunken captain would be dismissed, and he, Partridge the gallant, would reign in his stead. The schooner, no longer steadied by the wind, was at the mercy of every sea. Volumes of water poured over her. Presently she heeled over, for, with a triumphant scream, the wind leapt on to her from a fresh quarter. Following its usual course, the storm returned upon its track. The hurricane was about to repeat itself from the north-west.

The sea, pouring down through the burst hatchway, tore the door of the cuddy from its hinges. Sylvia found herself surrounded by a wildly-surging torrent which threatened to overwhelm her. She shrieked aloud for aid, but her voice was inaudible even to herself. Clinging to the mast which penetrated the little cuddy, she fixed her eyes upon the door behind which she imagined North was, and whispered a last prayer for succour. The door opened, and from out the cabin came a figure clad in black. She looked up, and the light of the expiring lamp showed her a face

that was not that of the man she hoped to see. Then a pair of dark eyes beaming ineffable love and pity were bent upon her, and a pair of dripping arms held her above the brine as she had once been held in the misty mysterious days that were gone.

In the terror of that moment the cloud which had so long oppressed her brain passed from it. The action of the strange man before her completed and explained the action of the convict chained to the Port Arthur coal-waggon, of the convict kneeling in the Norfolk Island torture-chamber. She remembered the terrible experience of Macquarie Harbour. She recalled the evening of the boat-building, when, swung into the air by stalwart arms, she had promised the rescuing prisoner to plead for him with her kindred. Regaining her memory thus, all the agony and shame of the man's long life of misery became at once apparent to her. She understood how her husband had deceived her, and with what base injustice and falsehood he had bought her young love. No question as to how this doubly-condemned prisoner had escaped from the hideous isle of punishment she had quitted occurred to her. She asked not—even in her thoughts—how

it had been given to him to supplant the chaplain in his place on board the vessel. She only considered, in her sudden awakening, the story of his wrongs, remembered only his marvellous fortitude and love, knew only, in this last instant of her pure, ill-fated life, that as he had saved her once from starvation and death, so had he come again to save her from sin and from despair. Whoever has known a deadly peril will remember how swiftly thought then travelled back through scenes clean forgotten, and will understand how Sylvia's retrospective vision merged the past into the actual before her, how the shock of recovered memory subsided in the grateful utterance of other days—"Good Mr. Dawes!"

The eyes of the man and woman met in one long wild gaze. Sylvia stretched out her white hands and smiled, and Richard Devine understood in his turn the story of the young girl's joyless life, and knew how she had been sacrificed.

In the great crisis of our life, when, brought face to fate with annihilation, we are suspended gasping over the great emptiness of death, we become conscious that the Self which we think we knew so well has strange and un-

thought-of capacities. To describe a tempest of the elements is not easy, but to describe a tempest of the soul is impossible. Amid the fury of such a tempest, a thousand memories, each bearing in its breast the corpse of some dead deed whose influence haunts us yet, are driven like feathers before the blast, as unsubstantial and as unregarded. The mists which shroud our self-knowledge become transparent, and we are smitten with sudden lightning-like comprehension of our own mis-used power over our fate.

This much we feel and know, but who can coldly describe the hurricane which thus o'erwhelms him? As well ask the drowned mariner to tell of the marvels of mid sea when the great deeps swallowed him and the darkness of death encompassed him round about. These two human beings felt that they had done with life. Together thus, alone in the very midst and presence of death, the distinctions of the world they were about to leave disappeared. Their vision grew clear. They felt as beings whose bodies had already perished, and as they clasped hands, their freed, souls recognizing each the loveliness of the other, rushed tremblingly together.

Borne before the returning whirlwind, an immense wave, which glimmered in the darkness, spouted up and towered above the wreck. The wretches who yet clung to the deck looked shuddering up into the belly-ing greenness, and knew that the end was come.

END OF BOOK THE FOURTH.



EPILOGUE.

AT day-dawn on the morning after the storm, the rays of the rising sun fell upon an object which floated on the surface of the water not far from where the schooner had foundered.

This object was a portion of the mainmast head of the *Lady Franklin*, and entangled in the rigging were two corpses—a man and a woman. The arms of the man were clasped round the body of the woman, and her head lay on his breast.

The Prison Island appeared but as a long low line on the distant horizon. The tempest

was over. As the sun rose higher the air grew balmy, the ocean placid ; and, golden in the rays of the new risen morning, the wreck and its burden drifted out to sea.

APPENDIX.



BOOK I.

CHAPTERS I., IV., V., VII.

REPORT of the Commission of Inquiry into the state of the colony of New South Wales. Printed by order of the House of Commons, 1822.

“Two Voyages to New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land,” by Thomas Reid [*Surgeon on board the Neptune and Morley transport ships*], Member of the Royal College of Surgeons in London, and Surgeon in the Royal Navy. London : Longman and Co., 1822.

“Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies,” by James Backhouse. London : Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1843.

Report of a Select Committee on Transportation. Printed by order of the House of Commons, 1838. [Evidence of Colonel Henry Breton. Q. 2431-2436.]

BOOK II.

CHAPTERS I., II., III.

REPORT of Select Committee [*ut supra*], 1838. Evidence of John Barnes, Esq., pp. 37-49.

Appendix to above Report, I., No. 56, B.

"Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science," &c., vol. ii. *Account of Macquarie Harbour*, by T. G. Lemprière, Esq., A.D.C.G., pp. 17, 107, 200. Tasmania : Henry Dowling. London : John Murray, 1846.

"Van Diemen's Land Anniversary and Hobart Town Almanac," 1831." *Account of Macquarie Harbour*, by James Ross, p. 262. Hobart Town : James Ross, 1832.

"Meliora," April, 1861—"Our Convict System : " case of Charles Anderson, chained to a rock for two years in irons. See also "Our Convicts," p. 233, vol. i., Mary Carpenter. Longmans, 1864.

"Backhouse's Narrative," [*ut supra*], chapters iii., iv.

Files of *Hobart Town Courier*, 1827-8, more especially 23rd October and 7th December, 1827, and 2nd February, 1828.

CHAPTERS IV. AND VIII.

Report of a Select Committee [*ut supra*], 1838, pp. 353, 354, 355.

CHAPTERS IX., XV., XVII.

"Tasmanian Journal" [*ut supra*], vol. I. : *Account of Macquarie Harbour*, by T. G. Lemprière, Esq. [*ut supra*]. The seizure of the *Cypress* (*sic.*), pp. 366-7. Escape of Morgan and Popjoy, p. 369. The seizure of the *Frederick*, pp. 371-375.

"Van Diemen's Land Annual," 1838 : *Narrative of the Sufferings and Adventures of certain of Ten Convicts, &c.*, pp. 1-11. Hobart Town : James Ross, 1838.

"Old Tales of a Young Country," by Marcus Clarke : *The Last of Macquarie Harbour*, pp. 141-146. *The Seizure of the Cyprus*, pp. 133-140. Melbourne : George Robertson, 1871.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER II.

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Report of Select Committee [*ut supra*], 1837. Evidence of Ernest Augustus Slade, Esq.—Q. 870. *Ibidem*, 1838 : Evidence of James Mudie, Esq.—Q. 804-813.

CHAPTER IX.

Backhouse's Narrative [*ut supra*] : Appendix lxxvi.

CHAPTER X.

"Van Diemen's Land Annual," 1838 [*ut supra*], pp. 12-33 : "Old Tales," &c. [*ut supra*]. *The Last of Macquarie Harbour*, pp. 147-156.

CHAPTER XV.

Report of Select Committee [*ut supra*], 1838 : Evidence of E. A. Slade, Esq.—Q. 1882-1892.
Ibidem : Appendix No ii., E.

CHAPTER XX.

Report of Select Committee [*ut supra*], 1837 : Evidence of John Russell, Esq., Asst. Surgeon 63rd Regiment.—Q. 426-615.

Ibidem : Evidence of Colonel Geo. Arthur.—Q. 4510-4548.

CHAPTERS XXIII., XXIV., XXVI.

"The Adventures of Martin Cash, the Bushranger." Hobart Town : J. L. Burke, 1870. pp. 64-70.

"Van Diemen's Land Annual" [*ut supra*], 1829 : Visit to Port Arthur. *Account of the Devil's Blow-hole*.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Report of Select Committee, [*ut supra*] 1832, Appendix I., No. 56, C. and D. Deposition of Alexander Pierce and official statements of trial and execution of Pierce and Cox for murder and cannibalism.

“The Bushrangers” by James Bonwick, Esq. Article—
“Port Arthur.”

BOOK IV.

CHAPTERS III., IV.

Sessional Papers printed by order of the House of Lords, 1847. Enclosure to No. XI. Extract of a paper by the Rev. T. B. Naylor. Enclosure 3 in No. XIV. Copy of Report [*dated Hobart Town, 20th June, 1846*] from Robert Pringle Stewart, Esq. : [*officer appointed by the Lieut.-Governor of Van Diemen's Land, to inspect the penal settlement of Norfolk Island*] to the Comptroller-General.

House of Lords report of Commission on the execution of Criminal Law, 1847 : Evidence of the Lord Bishop of Tasmania—Q. 4795-4904 and 5085-5130.

Despatch of His Excellency Sir William Denison to Secretary of State, 10th July, 1847.

Report of Select Committee [*ut supra*] 1838 : Evidence of the Very Rev. Wm. Ullathorne, D.D.—Q. 150-318.

Report of House of Lords [*ut supra*], 1847 : Evidence of Albert Charles Stonor, Esq., Crown Solicitor of New South Wales—Q. 5174-5197 : also evidence of Rev. Wm. Wilson, D.D.—Q. 5565-5568.

Correspondence relating to the dismissal of the Rev. T. Rogers from his chaplaincy at Norfolk Island ; for private circulation. Launceston : Henry Dowling : 1846.

Backhouse's Voyages [*ut supra*] : Chapters xxi., xxii., xxiii., xxiv.

CHAPTERS VII., VIII., IX., XII.

Adventures of Martin Cash, [*ut supra*] pp. 133-141 ; Cases of George Armstrong, "Pine Tree Jack," and Alexander Campbell.

Punishment of the "gag" and "bridle." Correspondence relating to Rev. T. Rogers [*ut supra*], pp. 41-43.

Report of Select Committee [*ut supra*], 1838 : Evidence of the Very Rev. Wm. Ullathorne, D.D.—Q. 267 :—

"As I mentioned the names of those men who were to die, they one after another, as their names were pronounced, dropped on their knees and thanked God that they were to be delivered from that horrible place, whilst the others remained standing mute, weeping. It was the most horrible scene I have ever witnessed."

Ibidem : Evidence of Colonel George Arthur.—Q. 4548.

Ibidem : Evidence of Sir Francis Forbes.—Q. 1119.

Ibidem : Q. 1335-1343 :

"* * * Two or three men murdered their fellow-prisoners, with the certainty of being detected and executed, apparently without malice and with very little excitement, stating that they knew that they should be hanged, but it was better than being where they were."

THE END.



